

ANCIENT ART IN MINIATURE:

Near Eastern Seals from
the Collection of
Martin and Sarah Cherkasky



HOLLY PITTMAN

in collaboration with JOAN ARUZ

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York

ANCIENT ART IN MINIATURE:

Near Eastern Seals from
the Collection of
Martin and Sarah Cherkasky

HOLLY PITTMAN

in collaboration with JOAN ARUZ

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York

The publication of this volume was made possible by funding from the Hagop Kevorkian Fund with additional support from Martin and Sarah Cherkasky.

Copyright © 1987 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

John P. O'Neill, *Editor in Chief*

Cynthia Clark, *Editor*

Matthew Pimm, *Production*

Peter Oldenburg, *Designer*

Composed by David E. Seham Associates Inc.

Printed and bound by Schneidereith & Sons, Baltimore, Md.

Black-and-white photography by Metropolitan Museum Photograph Studio. Photograph Fig. 15, courtesy Pierpont Morgan Library; Fig. 23, courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

On the cover: Cylinder-seal impression (Seal 72)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pittman, Holly.

Ancient art in miniature.

Exhibition catalog.

1. Seals (Numismatics)—Middle East—Exhibitions.
2. Glyptics—Exhibitions. 3. Cherkasky, Martin—
Art collections—Exhibitions. 4. Cherkasky, Sarah—
Art collections—Exhibitions. 5. Middle East—
Civilization—To 622—Exhibitions. I. Aruz, Joan.
II. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)
III. Title.

CD5344.P57 1987 737'.6 87-17173
ISBN 0-87099-489-1 (pbk.)

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
<i>Holly Pittman</i>	
DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD	5
<i>Philippe de Montebello</i>	
MAP AND CHRONOLOGY	6
INTRODUCTION	9
<i>Holly Pittman</i>	
VILLAGE TO STATE	18
<i>Holly Pittman</i>	
KINGSHIP AND THE GODS	24
<i>Holly Pittman</i>	
BACTRIA IN THE BRONZE AGE	32
<i>Holly Pittman</i>	
ANCIENT SYRIA: CENTERS OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE	37
<i>Joan Aruz</i>	
THE GREAT EMPIRES OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.	42
<i>Joan Aruz</i>	
CHECKLIST	47
TRANSLITERATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF SEAL INSCRIPTIONS	79
<i>Compiled by Ira Spar</i>	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MARTIN CHERKASKY's fascination with the miniature art of ancient seal engraving was apparent from the moment we met him, more than a decade ago. Vaughn Crawford, Prue Harper, and I spent all afternoon with him, looking through an interesting group of cylinder and stamp seals that he had assembled. His collection continued to grow over the years, piece by piece. Each and every seal—not just the most elaborate and beautiful ones—was special. He perceived and reveled in the wonderful variety, and he was amused and delighted by our efforts to identify the unusual pieces. The idea for an exhibition developed with his decision to give most of his collection to the Metropolitan Museum; he wanted to share with others the pleasure he had derived from the seals. From the outset he was enthusiastic about our idea for displaying the seals together with other objects in the Museum's collection to illustrate themes and styles in the art of the ancient Near East.

The unfamiliar imagery carved on seals often less than an inch in height makes their display particularly challenging, and a number of people have contributed their ideas and skills to this endeavor. Dr. Ayako Imai's preliminary research on the Cherkasky collection provided important information for the catalogue. Dr. Joan Aruz collaborated with me throughout this project, taking responsibility for the Syrian and first millennium sections and providing essential support throughout the planning of the exhibition. We are grateful to Dr. Ira Spar, who coordinated the translations of the inscriptions provided by Drs. Matthew Stolper, Wilfred Lambert, and Steve Kaufmann. We thank Dr. Edith Porada, who read the text of the catalogue, and Dr. Prudence O. Harper, Curator of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, who, as always, supported our efforts with indispensable scholarly, curatorial, and tactical advice.

Nayla Ghandour and Suzanne Heim, both Hagop Kevorkian Fund Fellows to the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, assisted in the initial and final preparations, respectively, for the catalogue and the exhibition. Karen Molleson and Adela Oppenheim, Assistants in the department, did an endless variety of tasks that made it possible for us to meet both catalogue and exhibition deadlines. Photography is one of the most crucial elements in the success of this kind of exhibition and catalogue. Without the unflagging support of Barbara Bridgers, Manager of the Photograph Studio, or the photographic skills of Carmel Wilson we never could have considered such an approach. Jo Goldberg patiently inked the drawings prepared by Joan Aruz and myself. Our thanks as well to Cynthia Clark, editor, Matthew Pimm, production, and Peter Oldenburg, designer, who all worked diligently on the catalogue, and to Michael Batista, who designed the exhibition.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

STAMP AND CYLINDER seals are a crucial source for the art, history, and religion of the ancient Near East. The rulers, gods, demons, and monsters that move in stately and seemingly dumb procession around the seals give us important insights into the real and magical worlds of the ancients. Cylinder and stamp seals were among the first objects to enter the Museum's collection from the Near East. In 1874 a large and interesting group was included in the Cesnola collection of ancient Cypriot art, and in 1886 cylinder and stamp seals from Mesopotamia—as well as more than three hundred cuneiform tablets—were acquired from William H. Ward. Through its participation in excavations and through gifts and purchases, the Museum has received since that time over a thousand stamp and cylinder seals from all periods and regions in the pre-Islamic Near East.

This catalogue and the exhibition in the Museum's Recent Acquisitions gallery acknowledge the generous gift of more than two hundred and fifty seals from the Martin and Sarah Cherkasky collection of stamp and cylinder seals. It is an important gift—one that substantially strengthens and supplements the Museum's holdings. Additionally, the exhibition includes a number of objects from the permanent collection for comparative and illustrative purposes.

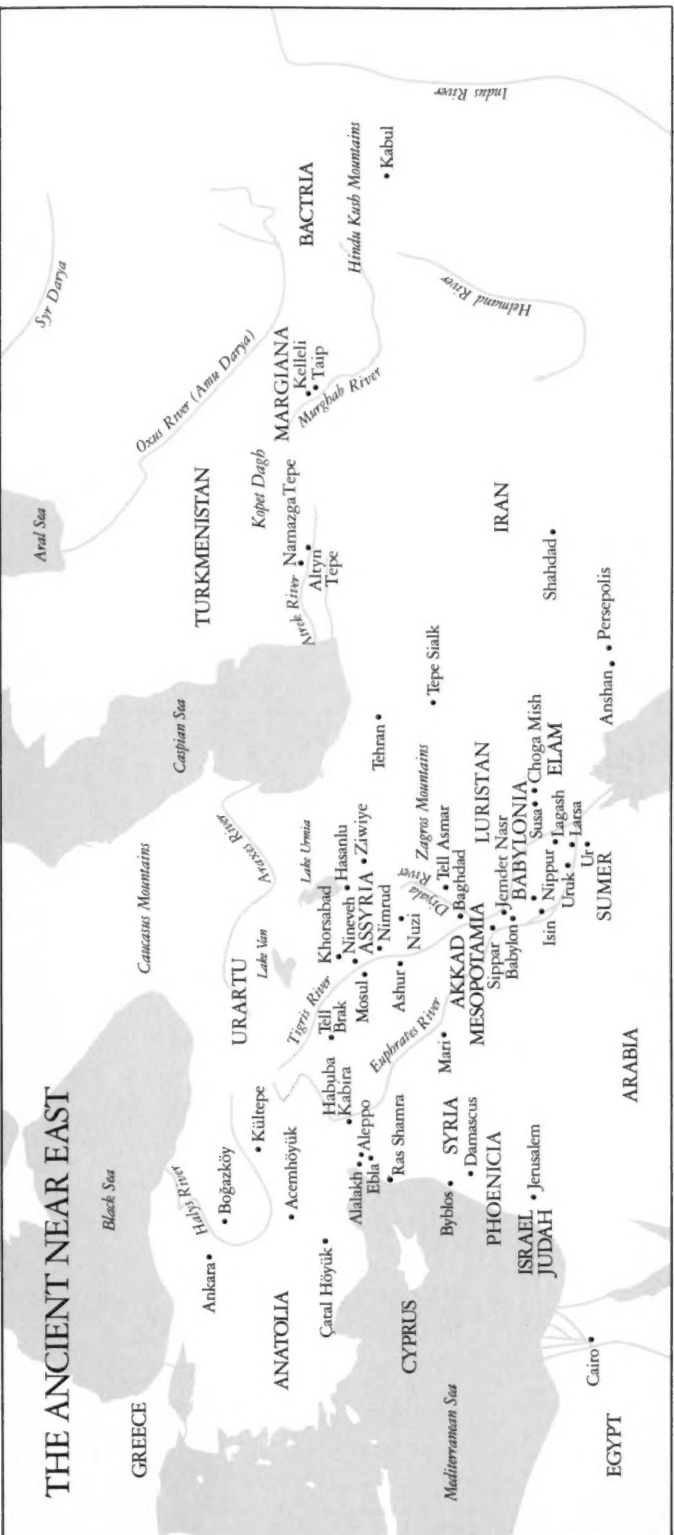
The exhibition of seals selected from the Cherkasky collection has been made possible by The Reliance Fund, which continues its support for the exhibition of the Museum's permanent collections. A generous grant from the Hagop Kevorkian Fund, combined with an additional gift from Martin and Sarah Cherkasky, has made possible the publication of this catalogue.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CHRONOLOGY

	MESOPOTAMIA (South)	MESOPOTAMIA (North)	WESTERN IRAN	SYRIA	ANATOLIA	W. CENTRAL ASIA
7000 B.C.		Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period			Çatal Hüyük	
6000 B.C.		Hassuna / Samarra period 6100–5700	Archaic period	Amuq A–B		
	Ubaid 1 period 5500–5000	Halaf period 5600–5000	Early Susiana period	Amuq C	Hacilar	
	Ubaid 2 period 5200–4800			Amuq D		
5000 B.C.	Ubaid 3 period 5000–4500	Early Northern Ubaid period 5000–4500	Middle Susiana period	Amuq E		Namazga I 4800–4000
	Ubaid 4 period 4500–4000	Late Northern Ubaid period 4500–4000				
4000 B.C.	Early Uruk period 4000–3700	Early Gawra period	Susa I	Amuq F	Late Chalcolithic period	Namazga II 4000–3500
	Middle Uruk period 3700–3500	Middle Gawra period				
3500 B.C.	Late Uruk period 3500–3100	Late Gawra period	Proto-urban period Susa II	Chalcolithic period Amuq G	Troy I	Namazga III 3500–3000
	Jemdet Nasr period 3100–2900		Proto-Elamite period Susa III	Amuq H		Namazga IV 3000–2500
3000 B.C.	Early Dynastic period 2900–2334		Sumero-Elamite period Susa IV	Early Bronze Age	Troy II	
	Akkadian period 2334–2154		Akkadian rule in Susa		Alaca Höyük royal tombs	Namazga V 2500–2200
	Neo-Sumerian period					Margiana and Bactrian Bronze Age 2100–1500
	Gudea of Lagash 2144–2124					
	Third Dynasty of Ur 2112–2004					
	Isin-Larsa period					

2000 B.C.	2017–1763 Old Babylonian period 1894–1595 Hammurabi 1792–1750 Kassite period 1595–1157	Old Assyrian period 1920–1740 Shamshi-Adad 1813–1781 Mitannian period 1500–1350 Middle Assyrian period 1350–1000 Neo-Assyrian period 883–612 Ashurnasirpal II 883–859 Sargon II 721–705 Achaemenid dynasty 550–331	Old Elamite period 1900–1500 Hasanlu V–IV Iron Age I–II 1500–800 Middle Elamite period Neo-Elamite period Median period Iron Age III	Middle Bronze Age Zimrilim 1781–1758 Alalakh VII 1720–1650 Late Bronze Age Alalakh IV 1500–1400 Iron Age Kingdoms of Israel and Judah Phoenician city-states Achaemenid rule	Assyrian Colony period 1920–1740 Old Hittite period 1650–1400 Hittite Empire period 1400–1200 Neo-Hittite and Aramaean states Urrartian period 850–600 Phrygian period 775–690 Achaemenid rule
1500 B.C.	Second Dynasty of Isin 1156–1025 Neo-Babylonian period 625–539	Capture of Babylon by the Greeks 331	Burning of Persepolis 331		



INTRODUCTION

THE DIMINUTIVE size of seals belies the significant role they have played in human society. Although the particular conventions dictating their use have varied greatly, seals have been important both as makers of marks and as objects in their own right. As makers of marks they were most often used as signatures indicating individual or institutional participation or agreement in a wide range of administrative activities; the image carried the weight of an authority recognized throughout the society. As objects they were works of art, signs of office or of status, heirlooms with personal or social meaning, or potent talismans to ward off evil spirits.

Many cultures have explored the idea of objects whose design can be recreated an infinite number of times. Such reproduction, commonplace today, is achieved either by stamping in color the raised, positive image on a stamp's surface or by creating a three-dimensional relief version of the negative, or *intaglio*, design carved on a seal by impressing it into a soft material, such as wax or clay. The images on the second type of seal are both reversed and "inside out," in the negative, a complicated conceptual challenge for the artist.

For millennia following their origin in Neolithic villages, engraved seals—those used to make three-dimensional relief images when impressed in clay—held a special place in the cultures of the ancient Near East. In the miniature images incised on them we can see the ideas, both sacred and secular, that were fundamental to the character of these earliest civilizations. Deities and sacred symbols, rulers and worshipers, fantastic creatures and animals were given specific forms that illustrated ancient man's perceptions of the world. The differing details of iconography, or subject, and the diversity of styles show how these perceptions changed over time and from place to place.

The ancient Near East is a general term that encompasses not only an enormous span of time, from the Neolithic cultures of the eighth millennium B.C. and earlier to the rise of Islam in the middle of the seventh century A.D., but also a vast and varied landscape that extends from Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) to the valley of the Indus River. People of many Near Eastern cultures used seals, but it was in Mesopotamia, the once-fertile alluvial plain traversed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, where glyptic work, the art of carving or engraving seals, found its fullest expression. In antiquity seals were numerous, serving as markers of identity when impressed on clay tablets, locks, jar stoppers, and tags. Many have been preserved because they were made of durable materials—stone, metal, and fired compositions—that have survived the passage of time.

For the historian of ancient Near Eastern art, seals are an especially valuable resource because they exist in large quantities for most periods during which they have been used. Beyond their usefulness for understanding the aesthetic values of these cultures, seals reveal religious, administrative, and governmental systems through their images, their inscriptions, and their functions.

The first attempts to organize ancient Near Eastern seals according to their cultural origins were made in the 1880s. By 1940 the basic outlines of their development in Mesopotamia and the surrounding regions had been formulated in two important studies, the first published in 1939 by Henri Frankfort of the University of Chicago and the second published a year later by Anton Moortgat at the Free University in Berlin. Since these pioneering efforts, much has been done to refine and expand stylistic and iconographic criteria for determining date as well as regional style. With the help of textual and contextual information, scholars have begun to interpret the meaning and the relationships of the images themselves.

The framework for the development of seals has been constructed using various kinds of evidence. The archaeological context in which the ancient impressions of seals are found is a strong indicator of date and provenance, often more so than the seals themselves, because seals were transported from place to place and were kept as meaningful objects long after their images ceased to be current. When impressed on written documents inscribed with a date, the period of a seal can be known even more precisely. Some seals are engraved with cuneiform or other ancient scripts that, in addition to date and provenance, give vital facts about the seal owner, his profession, and his family, political, or religious affiliation. The cultural attribution of seals without known archaeological context, such as those in this exhibition, is based on comparison with similar representations whose identities are assured.

Seals in Ancient Near Eastern Society

The earliest stamping devices were relatively large ceramic objects with stem handles and with geometric patterns engraved on their bases. They have been found in village settlements of the Neolithic period in Anatolia, the Levant, and northern Mesopotamia, with some of them dating before 6000 B.C. No impressions of these objects have been found, and it has been suggested that they were used to stamp patterns in dye on textiles or on human bodies. Even before the Halaf period of the second half of the sixth millennium B.C., seals were impressed on clumps of clay pressed around a knotted rope used to secure a door or the lid of a container. Seals had become part of a system that monitored the production, movement, and distribution of goods.

These early seals were always stamp seals, carved primarily in soft stones, with a flat surface engraved with a gouging tool in geometric or, slightly later, representational designs. They were usually pierced with a hole for suspension. Their shapes

are distinctive: hemispherical, rectangular with gabled or flat backs, and small animal sculptures. What specific connotations, if any, these shapes had for the ancient user is as yet unknown.

The earliest seals, some shaped like animals and found in graves, have been interpreted as having amuletic powers providing protection and good fortune to their owner. The world of ancient man was pervaded by powerful supernatural spirits capable of influencing all aspects of life. Magic was one of the most effective ways to control and direct these unpredictable forces; and the magical quality of seals was always significant in the Near East. In texts of a more recent period we are told that a dream depicting the loss of a seal might foretell the death of a child. An oft-repeated text of the first-millennium B.C. Neo-Assyrian period clearly illustrates the powers understood to be contained in seal stones:

A seal of hematite (portends) that that man shall lose what he has acquired.

A seal of lapis lazuli (portends) that he shall have power; his god shall rejoice over him.

A seal of crystal (portends) that he shall enlarge profits; his name shall be good.

A seal of ZA.TU.UD.AS. (portends) that he shall walk in joy of heart.

A seal of green marble (portends) that (until he comes) to the grave, favour upon favour shall be bestowed upon him.

A seal of GUG (portends) that the “persecutor” shall not be released from the body of the man.

(Ferris J. Stephens, trans., in Beatrice L. Goff, “The Role of Amulets in Mesopotamian Ritual Texts,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 [1956], p. 27.)

Related to this talismanic function is the value attached to a seal as an heirloom and as a votive offering to the gods. Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.), one of the last kings of Assyria, sealed a treaty with the vassal states in the Zagros Mountains using a Middle Assyrian royal seal that at the time was more than five hundred years old. Throughout the millennia seals were deposited as votive offerings in temples and intentionally built into sacred walls and altars, some inscribed with prayers or divine dedications. The gods too owned seals, which were kept in the temple or were worn by their cult image.

The most prevalent, but as yet poorly studied, use of seals was as part of the administrative system, the tools of which were based on clay, an abundant local natural resource. In Greater Mesopotamia, which included southwestern Iran and the northeastern reaches of the Euphrates River valley, a complex administrative system had developed by the Late Uruk period (about 3500 B.C.). It included such tools as clay tablets impressed with numerical signs, hollow clay balls containing geometric counters, and clay sealings for jars and door locks. While still damp these clay objects were impressed with a new kind of seal, cylindrical in form; this shape made it possible to easily cover irregular surfaces with the images carved on the seal. It also allowed the development of a whole new compositional arrangement of im-

ages, not because it provided more room than stamp seals, which were in some cases quite large, but because its impression created a continuous, potentially unending band of repeating design. The cylinder not only became the preferred shape for seals in Mesopotamia, but the aesthetic possibilities of the decorative band were explored both in glyptic and in more monumental art.

The images engraved on the seals identified individuals or groups that participated in the production and redistribution of goods and in the payment for services in the emerging Mesopotamian state. Very quickly this ingenious administrative scheme required the momentous invention of writing. The close association of seals with the development of writing is reflected in the early pictographic sign for seal, which represents a writing reed and a ruled clay tablet combined. In other ancient cultures—in Egypt, the Aegean, and China—the initial stages of writing were also closely linked to the use of seals.

As the pictographic script developed in Mesopotamia over the next one thousand years into the logographic and syllabic cuneiform writing system, the use of cylinder seals to mark written documents virtually disappeared. Seals did, however, continue to be used extensively to mark containers, jars, baskets, boxes, and bags as well as to lock doors by means of ropes secured to knobs to discourage unauthorized openings (Figs. 1a, 1b).

During the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112–2004 B.C.) the bureaucracy of the Mesopotamian city-state expanded along with the area controlled by the centralized

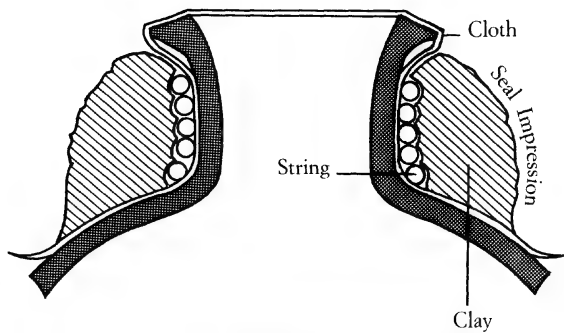


FIG. 1a Section of the neck of a storage jar sealed with clay. Drawing after H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London, 1939), p. 2, fig. 1

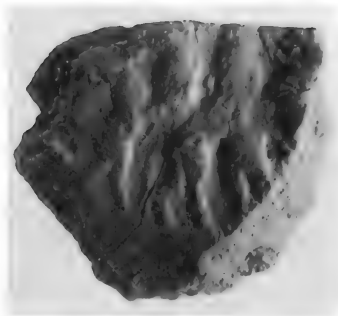


FIG. 1b Door sealing with cylinder-seal impression of a contest scene. Clay. Nippur, Southern Mesopotamia; Sumerian, Early Dynastic II period, 2750–2600 B.C. H. 3.9 cm. Joint Expedition to Nippur, Rogers Fund, 1959, 59.41.46



FIG. 2 Tablet envelope with cylinder-seal impressions. Clay. Kültepe, Anatolia; Old Assyrian Colony period, ca. 1920–1840 B.C. L. 5.5 cm. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Klejman, 1966, 66.245.17b



FIG. 3 Promissory note for repayment of a loan of barley with a stamp-seal impression. Clay. Nimrud, Northern Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian period, 7th century B.C. L. 5.1 cm. Rogers Fund, 1954, 54.117.28

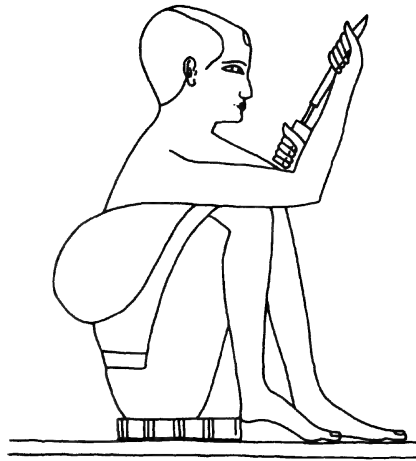
Ur III authority. In addition to protecting goods from tampering, cylinder seals were once again impressed on certain kinds of written documents (Fig. 2). These were primarily records of disbursements and receipts of goods and services, as well as letter orders and such legal texts as sale, loan, gift, employment, and court documents. These sealing practices continued, expanding and changing throughout all of the second and much of the first millennia, until the stamp seal was reintroduced (Fig. 3), in part as a response to the increased use of the alphabetic script written on parchment or papyrus, which was rolled and tied with string that was secured by a clay stamp-impressed bulla.

In the regions east and west of Mesopotamia, stamp seals were continually used along with cylinders. Both types of seals were used not only to mark documents and locks, but also on occasion to mark ceramic vessels and cult objects. This practice was particularly common during the third and early second millennia B.C., when large storage jars were impressed, perhaps to authenticate their volume or to indicate their origin or ownership. The significance of the Old Babylonian seal of the early second millennium B.C. rolled across the top of a ceramic libation vessel decorated with sculpted animals and a human figure (Fig. 4) is unclear. In Israel during the Iron Age period of the first millennium, handles of large storage jars were impressed with stamp seals bearing images or names inscribed in Aramaic; they are thought to



FIG. 4 Libation vessel in the shape of a tower with a cylinder-seal impression. Ceramic. Syria(?), ca. 19th century B.C. H. 31.4 cm. Rogers Fund, 1968, 68.155

FIG. 5 Detail of a stone wall relief from the Tomb of Ty. Saqqara, Egypt; Dynasty V (2498–2345 B.C.). Drawing after P. Newberry, *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* (December 1905), opposite p. 286



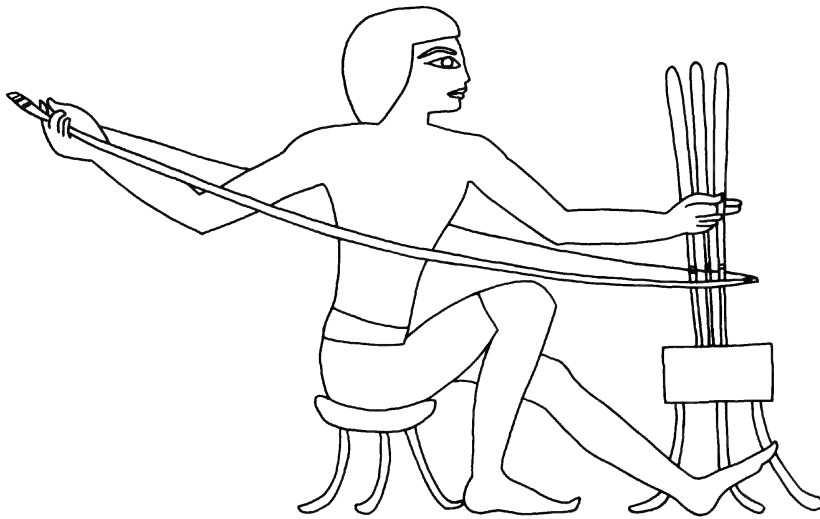
have been a means of collecting or recording revenues on liquid commodities such as oil or wine.

The Seal Carver and His Craft

Mesopotamian cuneiform texts offer us a glimpse of the seal carver: his training, working conditions, materials, and place in society. In a text of the Persian period (538–331 B.C.) we learn that a slave trained as an apprentice to a seal cutter for several years. On a tablet from Ur we learn that lapidaries, stone workers who included seal cutters, worked together with metal, wood, leather, rope, and reed craftsmen. The materials used in the Ur workshop included soft stones such as alabaster and harder stones such as lapis lazuli and quartz. The lapidary not only cut, shaped, and polished the stones, but may also have created artificial materials, among them faience or early glass.

The steps for making seals included shaping the stone, drilling the string hole,

FIG. 6 Detail of a wall painting from the Tomb of Rekhmira, vizier to Tuthmosis III (ca. 1504–1450 B.C.). Theban Necropolis, Egypt; Dynasty XVIII. Drawing after C. Wilkinson, *Egyptian Wall Paintings: The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection of Facsimiles* (New York, 1983), no. 31.6.25, p. 90



and engraving the design. The shaping of a seal blank was done with a grinding tool charged with an abrasive such as quartz or emery, which in its course of development was eventually fixed to a wheel. A flint tool was sufficient to drill soft stones, but the holes in the harder stones, among them the quartzes, were made by copper drills with either a spherical or tubular tip used with abrasives. At first the drills were held by hand, as we see illustrated in an Egyptian wall relief of the Fifth Dynasty (2498–2345 B.C.; Fig. 5). In an Eighteenth Dynasty (1570–1320 B.C.) painting a man drills beads by pushing a horizontal bow that in turn rotates the spindles that hold the drill bits (Fig. 6). The bow drill was considerably faster and easier to operate than was the hand drill.

The style of the engraving on the seals reflected the shape of the tool used. The simplest tool, a burin or graver, had a pointed or beveled tip that created lines of varying thickness and depth. Ball and tubular drills made hemispherical patterns that were schematic unless modified by the graver. During the Late Uruk, the Mitannian (fifteenth to fourteenth century B.C.), and the Neo-Assyrian periods (ninth

to seventh century B.C.), schematic patterns made by drills were particularly popular. A wheel-cut style, common intermittently from the third to the first millennia, testifies to the early existence of a cutting wheel mounted on a horizontal spindle driven by the rotary motion of a bow. The seal would have been held in the hand and brought to the fixed bow lathe.

The limits of technology, along with symbolic and aesthetic considerations, dictated the types of stones used for seals. Until the middle of the third millennium, soft stones such as chlorite, steatite, serpentine, marble, limestone, and alabaster, all of which could be cut with flint tools, were commonly used for seals. With the development of metal tools during the Middle Bronze Age, lapidaries, with the aid of abrasives including quartz sand and emery, were able to shape and carve seals from harder stones. Hematite, a moderately hard (five to six on the Moh's scale), shiny blackish gray stone, was frequently used, while in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages quartz was preferred.

Almost all of the stones used for seals were imported into Mesopotamia. Some stones were available in nearby highland sources; others came from longer distances, notably lapis lazuli, the deep blue stone appreciated by kings and gods and found in mines high in the Hindu Kush of Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan. In Sumerian lore Inanna, goddess of the earth and of fertility, wore a necklace and held a rod and ring made of lapis lazuli when she descended to the underworld. Lapis lazuli was also the stone that the king of Uruk favored for embellishing sacred shrines. In a third-millennium myth, Enmerkar, an early Sumerian king, prays to Inanna:

Let them (the people of Aratta) fashion artfully gold (and) silver,

Let them . . . pure lapis *from* the slab,

Let them . . . *precious stone* (and) pure lapis lazuli; . . .

Of the holy [*gip*]arru where you have established (your) [dwelling],

May (the people of) Aratta fashion artfully its interior

(Samuel Noah Kramer, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* [Philadelphia, 1952], p. 9.)

The Imagery Engraved on Seals

The expression of personal ideas and emotions, so typical of the visual and other arts of today, held little value for the people of the ancient Near East. Rather, the function of visual images was in large part to articulate and to reinforce the organizing principles of society. Because of its public character, monumental art was the visual context in which those guidelines were most clearly expressed. Scenes painted on the walls of public buildings, or carved in stone both in the round and in low relief, and images modeled and molded in clay expressed the relationships between gods and kings and humanity. As those relationships changed, so did the public imagery, and, to differing degrees, these modifications affected the images on seals.

The primary function of the seal in Mesopotamian society was to identify its owner, either as an individual or as a member of a group. Even before the middle of the Early Dynastic period some seals were inscribed with personal or institutional names, but in most periods the majority of seals were differentiated only by their imagery. To be recognizable the images must have had significance determined both by traditional usage and by the sacred and secular authorities. The sources of seal imagery were many, and certainly they varied over time. In some periods only a few motifs were included in the repertory of the seal cutter, even though we find numerous other motifs in public monuments. In other periods seal imagery seems to have had a broader iconographic range, using many scenes known only in seals in addition to those familiar in other media.

Through the study of seals we can learn a great deal about the people of the ancient Near Eastern worlds. Seals remain our most complete record of the visual arts, showing us the truly inventive talents of some of the best ancient artists. The Collection of Martin and Sarah Cherkasky, formed over the past decade, has fine examples of seals from over four thousand years of Mesopotamian history as well as seals from other cultures, such as second-millennium Syria and ancient Bactria (today northeastern Afghanistan). Through this collection we can see that the glyptic arts were a vital mode of expression for cultures in which images were essential to communication. To give some idea of the cultural context in which the Cherkasky seals were created and used, larger-scale objects from the collection of the Museum's Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art have been integrated into this exhibition, presented to illuminate the iconographic themes and stylistic schemes that may also be discerned in the seals themselves.

VILLAGE TO STATE

BY THE MIDDLE of the sixth millennium B.C., village communities long established in the fertile foothills surrounding the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers had developed an economy based on the cultivation of cereals and the herding of domesticated animals, augmented by hunting. Villages within a region shared many features of their material culture. They had contact with people outside their area through the long-distance exchange of useful or prestigious commodities such as obsidian, a volcanic glass. Archaeological investigation has shown that within these village cultures some production was specialized and that social stratification existed in communities organized predominately along kinship lines and led by chieftains, part of whose responsibility it was to accumulate and to redistribute goods.

The seals of these early periods were always stamp seals engraved on their flat bases with linear geometric patterns or with images of wild, usually horned, animals. In the Halaf period (about 5600–5000 B.C.) some seals, perhaps with special amuletic powers, were shaped as pendants or animals, such as the hedgehog of Seal 1. The linear impression of the incised base has the distinctive outline of an animal. Later, in the Ubaid period (5000–3600 B.C.), stamp seals were given a round or rectangular sealing face and a hemispherical or gabled back pierced with a hole for suspension. The reversed (*tête-bêche*) composition of two animals, seen on Seal 6, is typical of this period. It is possible that this was not strictly a decorative device but one that allowed the image to be read from two views. The geometric and wild-animal imagery found in seals is also seen in the contemporary painted ceramic vessels, some of which are even shaped as animals (Fig. 7).

Human figures occur for the first time in seals during the latter part of the Ubaid period. Sometimes wearing animal horns or having animal heads and feet, these figures are most often shown holding, or “mastering,” animals, usually snakes, as in Seal 3, although they are also seen with wild sheep, goats, and boars. The most highly articulated of these seals have been found at Susa, in southwestern Iran, and show scenes in which shaman-like personages are clearly engaged in some kind of ritual activity.

Sometime during the fourth millennium the Sumerians, whose origins remain unknown, joined the so-called Proto-Euphrateans who were living in well-established village communities in the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia. Before 3500 B.C. the organization of these communities changed radically. Increasing population, competition for scarce resources, and warfare contributed to the consolidation of the relatively equally distributed village populations into a few large urban centers.

Uruk (ancient Warka and biblical Erech) was by far the largest of these centers in the Sumerian heartland. It is after this site that this dynamic period is named.

During the Late Uruk period (3500–3100 B.C.) technological and institutional innovations were adopted that permanently transformed human society. At Uruk as well as at sites along the Euphrates in Syria and at Susa and Choga Mish in nearby Iranian Khuzestan, evidence of monumental architecture, massive city walls, large-scale figural art, and a more complex social organization than had been known in the earlier village cultures has been found. One of the most significant among these innovations was the development of writing. Although the earliest pictographic tablets cannot be read with absolute certainty, their economic character is clear. For reasons that must include both increased complexity and altered social and economic alignments, it was no longer possible to trust to memory or to simple counting devices the recording of the movement of goods and the payment for services.

Stamp seals continued to be used, often sculpted in the form of animals or animal heads. Lion heads (Seal 9) and bulls and rams recumbent with their heads turned to one side (Seal 8) were the most common shapes, although other animals, including fish (Seal 11), are known. Seal 7, a small sculpture of a seated female squatting in a working posture with one knee raised, is one of the finest examples of this type known; details of her face, her hair held with an inlaid diadem, and her breasts are all carefully rendered. This image was repeated in a schematic drilled pattern on many cylinders (Seal 15), frequently cut from the same pink mineral. Geometric

FIG. 7 Vessel in the shape of a boar. Ceramic. Iranian, ca. 3000 B.C. H. 14.5 cm. Rogers Fund and Anonymous Gift, 1979, 1979.71



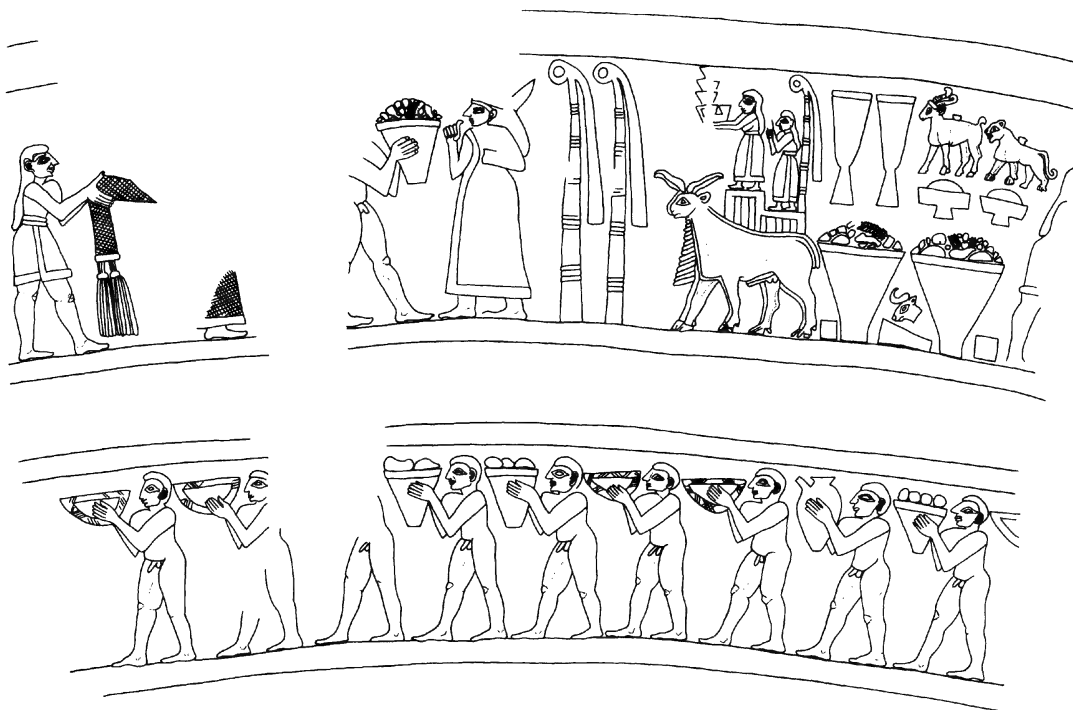


FIG. 8 Detail of the Uruk (Warka) vase illustrating offerings brought to the goddess(?) standing in front of her symbols. Alabaster. Southern Mesopotamia; Sumerian, Late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr period, ca. 3200–2900 B.C. Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Drawing adapted from E. Heinrich, *Kleinfunde aus den archaischen Tempelschichten in Uruk* (Leipzig, 1936), pl. 38

patterns or animals, in many cases herding dogs with a distinctively turned-up tail (Seal 10), were engraved, often with a drill, on the flat sealing surface of these stamp seals. There is no evidence that these particular stamps were actually used as sealing devices. The suggestion, made long ago, that they served as a kind of badge of affiliation is consistent with what little we know of this early economic system.

Cylinder seals, invented during the Late Uruk period along with other administrative tools, were a central part of the early administrative system. The wide range of images on these first cylinder seals included files of animals, both domesticated and wild, heraldic groupings of animals generally associated with signlike representations of goods, and literal portrayals of human activity. Variations on the theme of bringing goods to the temple (Seal 14), the center of this early urban society, are known on large-scale works of art, including the famous vase from Uruk (Fig. 8) on which a procession of offering-bearers approaches a female figure who is either a divinity or her representative. This and similar scenes depict events that undoubtedly took place outside the temple. Another type of scene shows activities from daily life in which men and women work with vessels and textiles (Seal 15). In contrast to the art of ancient Egypt, this type of portrayal was unusual in the Near East and is rarely found

in large-scale works of art. Some of these cylinders depicting workers are cut in a realistic, literal style, while others are rendered in a more schematic drilled style on short, squat seals. From the excavated evidence it appears that working scenes were numerous at Susa, whereas the ritual and leadership themes were more widespread at Uruk. At Habuba Kabira in Syria, scenes with animals and symbols were common. Whether this apparent regional variety in iconography reflects something of the relationship of the societal core at Uruk to the settlements on the periphery remains to be seriously considered.

The style in which many of these scenes were depicted complements their content. It is a direct, literal, representational presentation in which the figures were formed by simple modeled masses, properly proportioned and detailed with all significant features. With the exception of a ruler-like figure who sometimes appears larger, the figures were differentiated solely by their actions and their attributes. This literal quality may be closely related to the invention of writing, with images to be understood in a way similar to early signs of pictographic writing.

Over the next few centuries this stylistic and iconographic literalness was gradually replaced by a more symbolic repertory of images rendered in a stylized manner. Some of these seals bore geometric patterns (Seal 17), others schematic renderings of animals (Seal 16). Birds in flight as well as goats and sheep were popular images in these glyptic styles.

By the middle of the Early Dynastic period (2900–2334 B.C.), about 2500 B.C., we encounter our first historical facts. We know the names of a few actual kings and have records, however brief and ambiguous, of their mighty deeds. In southern Mesopotamia, Sumer was organized into a system of city-states, among them Lagash, Umma, Adab, Ur, and Enlil's holy city at Nippur, all of whose citizens competed fiercely with each other for scarce resources, notably fertile alluvial land for cultivation and water for irrigation. It is thought that this perpetual condition of conflict required the creation of the permanent office of kingship. Previously existing only when needed, this office gradually accumulated power, resources, and prestige; it remained closely tied to the organization of the temple throughout the third millennium. Kings of this era—Gilgamesh, Enmerkar, and Lugalbanda—became the legendary heroes of the epic tales written down in later periods. These vivid descriptions of their adventures and achievements are matched by the extraordinary wealth of objects, made from rare and exotic materials worked with great artistry, found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (Early Dynastic IIIa, 2600–2500 B.C.).

In the glyptic arts the variety of the Late Uruk period is replaced by three types of scenes: combat, banquet or assembly, and cultic rituals and myths. A study of the distribution of seals carved with these subjects in the graves at the Royal Cemetery suggests that they may have served as insignia, each appropriate to a function within the administrative hierarchy. The combat scene pitting human and bullmen heroes against wild animals and fantastic creatures (Seal 18) had its origins in the sculpture



FIG. 9 Two-register banquet scene with seated figures drinking beer through tubes. Cylinder-seal impression (modern). Mesopotamia; Sumerian, Early Dynastic IIIa period, 2600–2334 B.C. H. 3.7 cm. Rogers Fund, 1956, 56.157.1

of the Late Uruk or Jemdet Nasr periods. In the Early Dynastic period it became the most popular iconographic theme in the glyptic arts. This struggle between powerful forces quickly lost its fierceness, however, and became an endlessly repetitive decorative frieze.

The scene second in popularity, but one not well represented in the exhibition, is the banquet setting in which two or more figures sit facing each other and drink from cups or from tubes leading to a large central vessel (Fig. 9). It is possible that this represents the gathering of a communal governing body.

Seal 19 provides an example of the third, and rarest, type of scene. Here we see a cult ritual performed in the presence of an anthropomorphic deity identified in the visual arts from this period on by its flounced garment and horned miter. Men carry boxes on their heads toward a stepped altar, similar to the later, monumentally stepped towers called ziggurats. Standing across from each other, two men place a box on the altar. The deity, perhaps female, sits to the side of the procession and holds in her hands two branches, which identify her as a fertility figure, perhaps the Sumerian goddess Inanna. Representations of figures carrying boxes on their heads are known in other media in the Early Dynastic period, including a fine statue of a striding nude male who may be shown making a similar ritual presentation of an offering to a deity (Fig. 10). This same action, carried out by men wearing skirts, is also known on wall plaques and shell inlays of the period.

Beginning before the third millennium, Semitic tribesmen from the western desert gradually entered the Mesopotamian plain, and in 2334 B.C. the forceful Semitic ruler Sargon the Great brought the era of city-states to an end by dominating and unifying the contending centers from his capital of Akkad, somewhere to the north of Sumer. The great Akkadian dynasty he founded lasted for just under two hundred years and permanently altered Mesopotamian culture. In the arts a new interest in narrative and in storytelling replaced the use of static symbols. Seals were filled with references to myths that illustrated the relationships of the gods to one another and to man, their eternal servant (Figs. 11, 12). There is no evidence as yet to support the impres-

sion that these representations were copies of brightly colored wall paintings that enlivened the temple and palace walls. The scene of a presentation of a worshiper to an enthroned figure, divine or mortal, which became so important in the glyptic art of subsequent periods, was first devised during the Akkadian period (Seal 22). The combat scene, such as the one on Seal 21, continued to be the single most popular motif in Akkadian glyptic arts; whether this motif refers to a specific story is not certain, but the introduction of the water buffalo as a combatant clearly reflects the expansion of Akkadian contact to include, at least indirectly, lands as distant as the Indus Valley.



FIG. 10 Statue of a man carrying a box on his head. Arsenical copper. Mesopotamia; Sumerian, Early Dynastic II period, 2750–2600 B.C. H. 37.8 cm. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1955, 55.142



FIG. 11 Snake god and deities with snake, scorpion, and goat hands and feet. Cylinder-seal impression (modern). Mesopotamia; Akkadian period, 2334–2154 B.C. H. 3.2 cm. Gift of Walter Hauser, 1955, 55.65.5



FIG. 12 Hunting scene in mountainous terrain. Cylinder-seal impression (modern). Mesopotamia; Akkadian period, 2334–2154 B.C. H. 2.8 cm. Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941, 41.160.192

KINGSHIP AND THE GODS

THE FALL of the dynasty of Akkad to the barbarian Guti, who came from the Zagros Mountains in the east, brought to a close an expansive and vital era in Near Eastern history, whose powerful influence was felt for more than a millennium. The defeat of Naram Sin, the penultimate Akkadian dynast, deified during his reign for his many military victories, was interpreted by succeeding generations as divine retribution for his wanton destruction of the god Enlil's sacred precinct of Ekur in the holy city of Nippur.

Far to the south in Sumer, the city of Lagash escaped the devastation of the invading barbarians. Its governors, Gudea (2144–2124 B.C.) and his son Ur-Ningirsu (2123–2119 B.C.), presented themselves in their inscriptions and in their distinctive statuary as devout and pious servants of the gods. They and their successors drew inspiration from earlier Sumerian traditions, thus earning this period its designation as the Neo-Sumerian Renaissance. Under the leadership of Utu-hegal, king of Uruk, the countryside was cleared of the despised invaders, and an era of prosperity and unity that was to last over a century was established. Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 B.C.), the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur, and his son Shulgi (2094–2047 B.C.) were the great architects of the Neo-Sumerian revival. They replaced the Akkadian system of military control and vassal states with a centralized political system that employed governors (*ensi*) appointed by the king and supported by a vast and intricate bureaucracy. Piety, reverence, goodness, confidence, competence, and responsibility were themes frequently emphasized in Ur III texts.

We see these changes in attitude repeated in the tone and subject matter of the artistic expression of the period. In the monumental arts the Akkadian theme of military victory was replaced by scenes of presentation and libation before the gods and deified kings; depictions of construction scenes reflected the building or restoration of many temples and sacred complexes, homes to the powerful divinities, as well as the erection of the first great stepped towers, the ziggurats.

On seals the numerous lively scenes of the Akkadian period that had captured mythical and historical moments were replaced by a single theme: the presentation of a worshiper to an enthroned divinity or deified king (Seal 23). In most compositions the worshiper was led by an interceding goddess, but occasionally he stood alone in front of the enthroned figure. Often beautifully executed in hematite in minute and realistic detail, this type of scene was a direct quotation from the monumental imagery in wall paintings and on stone relief carvings. Obedience, order, and hierarchy were

all clearly expressed in this theme, and the highly idealized, controlled realism of the carving strongly reinforced these values.

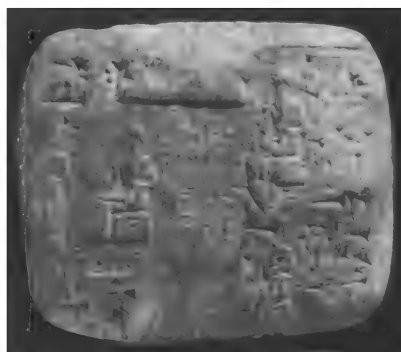
Apart from the rare filling motif, the only significant variety among these seals lies in the identity of the seated figure. A bearded deity, or more often a goddess, wearing a flounced robe and horned miter sits on a throne shaped like the articulated facade of a temple. A ruler figure wearing a fringed robe and a cap with an upturned brim—exactly like those worn by Gudea in his statues (Fig. 13)—sits on a stool padded with fleece and holds a cup in his extended right hand. Most kings of the Neo-Sumerian period were deified during their lifetimes, a continuation of the precedent established by the Akkadian king Naram Sin, and their placement in the position of the divinity in these presentation scenes reflects that practice.

A large number of these seals were inscribed, frequently with the name of the owner and his familial, divine, or secular affiliation. Although seals had been inscribed much earlier, it became a standard practice only in the Ur III period. In fact, the seal impressions made on tablets, again marked by seals for the first time since the Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods, were often placed so that the inscription was central and could be clearly read, leaving the images of the presentation incompletely impressed on either side (Fig. 14).



FIG. 13 Statue of seated Gudea. Diorite. Tello(?), Southern Mesopotamia; Neo-Sumerian period, 2144–2124 B.C. H. 44 cm. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1959, 59.2

FIG. 14 Tablet with a list of religious offerings impressed with the seal of Ur-Lisi, governor of Umma. Clay. Southern Mesopotamia; Neo-Sumerian period, reign of Amar-Suen, 2046–2038 B.C. H. 4.3 cm., W. 5.2 cm. Gift of the Ancient Arts Gallery, in memory of Azeer Khayat, 1965, 65.72



The Neo-Sumerian bureaucracy gave the presentation scene, first introduced by the Akkadians (Seal 22), such importance that it became the predominant theme in all glyptic art of the first half of the second millennium. It was the standard theme, cut in a linear style and embellished by various secondary motifs, on seals used in the nineteenth century B.C. by Old Assyrian officials in their trading colony at Kültepe, ancient Kanesh, in central Anatolia (Seal 24). It was adopted in Iran as well by the kings of Elam (Seal 25), who had gained their independence by defeating the last of the Ur III dynasts, Ibbi Sin. The composition of the Old Elamite examples, also cut in a linear style but with such distinctive details as outward-turning horns on the divine headdress, remained essentially unchanged until later in the period, when the deity was shown standing opposite a worshiper (Seal 26).

The Ur III dynasty collapsed under internal and external pressures just before 2000 B.C., and for the next two centuries Mesopotamia was divided into petty kingdoms that vied continually for control. Groups of Semitic nomads, the Amorites, arrived in large numbers from the western desert. Rulers of Isin and Larsa dominated the political scene until 1792 B.C., when Hammurabi, the sixth king of the Amorite dynasty ruling in the city of Babylon, prevailed to unify Sumer and Akkad into a land called Babylonia. Although this unity was short-lived, Babylonia prospered under Hammurabi, most famous for his great code of laws carved on a stone stele now in the Louvre museum in Paris.

Hammurabi's successors were challenged in the north and south by vassal rulers. In the middle of the seventeenth century B.C. the kingdom of Babylonia was reduced to the city of Babylon and its surrounding countryside. In 1595 B.C. the Hittite king Mursilis, who had invaded the Levant from Anatolia, taking advantage of Babylon's weakened state, attacked and destroyed the capital city. The Kassites, whose origins remain uncertain, filled the political vacuum in Babylon, ruling until 1155 B.C.

Although the Amorites had increased their presence and political power during the first centuries of the second millennium B.C., we know through the vast written and visual documentation preserved from the Old Babylonian period that the traditional deities of the Sumerians and the Akkadians continued to be revered according to the age-old rituals and beliefs. The standard presentation scene endured as an important part of the glyptic repertory, especially during the early part of the Old Babylonian period, preceding the reign of Hammurabi.

In its mature period Old Babylonian glyptic imagery included many other figures, frequently divine, which were presented in varying combinations. We see the major gods of the Babylonian pantheon—Shamash, the sun god; Ishtar, the goddess of love and war; Nergal, the god of death; and Adad, the weather god—represented as heroic figures, many in postures and with attributes defined during the Akkadian period. They are not shown, as they had been earlier, interacting in unified scenes that tell a story or capsule a ritual event; rather they appear as separate icons whose accouterments and posture are constant regardless of their changing relationships.

FIG. 15 Shamash in ascending posture approached by a king offering a goat. Cylinder-seal impression (modern). Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian period, 1825–1750 B.C., Sippar style. H. 2.5 cm. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York



It seems that the function of these images was to convey faithfully a potent original image or group of images. We know that by the Third Dynasty of Ur the cult statue as a physical embodiment of the deity was the focus of elaborate ritual activity and that its daily care and feeding was a primary occupation of a large cadre of priests. One possible, although unproved, explanation for the consistency in the appearance of some of the figures in Old Babylonian glyptic art is that these images were renderings of the sculpted cult images decorated with golden garments that gleamed within the temple complexes of the great cities of Ur, Babylon, Sippar, and Ishchali. In the best seals, compositional coherence of the scenes is achieved through the spacious placement of figures that suggests a monumental architectural setting.

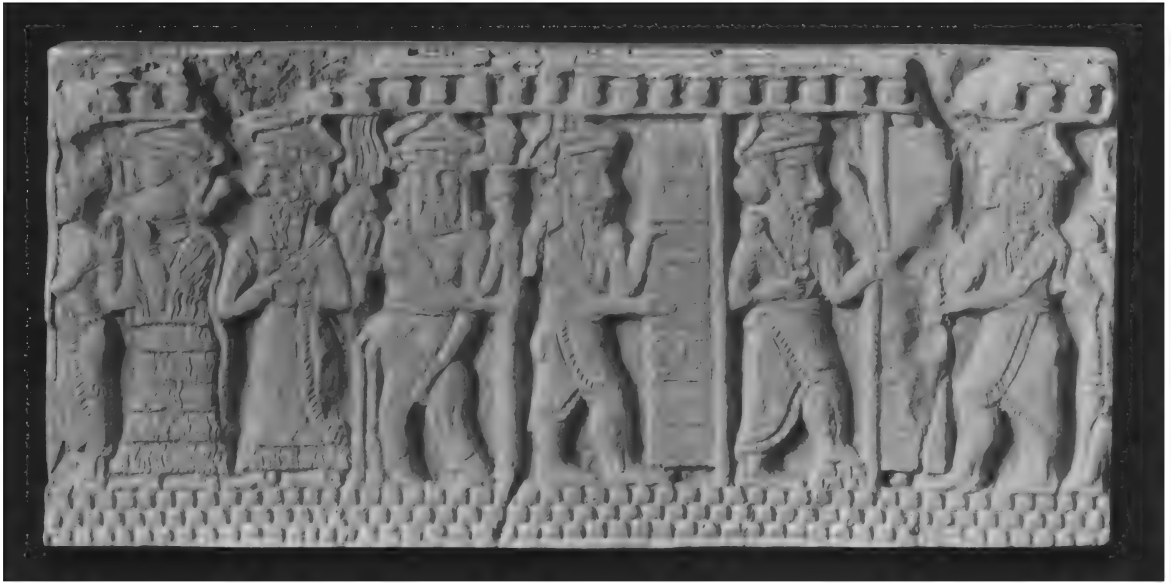
Old Babylonian seals were cut in a wide range of styles that had regional as well as temporal significance. One well-defined group is from Sippar; these figures appear as highly modeled forms, with great attention given to the plastic quality of the flounced garments of the deities (Fig. 15). More typical during this period is the schematic construction of figures seen in Seals 27 or 30. Although a detailed chronology has not been established for Old Babylonian glyptic styles, it is thought that the smaller, highly schematic linear-style seals (Seal 31) were probably made late in the period.

The major gods of the Old Babylonian period were represented as heroic figures, as in the Akkadian period. Minor divinities, demons, and many symbolic fillers were new creations. The horned headdress and the flounced robe remained prerogatives of divinity, while rulers and worshipers wore fringed robes, either long or short, and a brimmed cap.

The Gods of the Old Babylonian Period

SHAMASH

The sun god Shamash (the Sumerian god Utu) was an important deity of the Old Babylonian period. Seen either enthroned or in ascending posture with one foot placed on a symbolic mountain, Shamash was represented holding a saw with which he “cut” truthful and just decisions. We know from such documents as the famous



code of Hammurabi and from the myriad commercial and legal documents of the time that the society was deeply concerned with the accurate execution of justice. This is reflected in the high status accorded Shamash in the Old Babylonian pantheon. The symbol of Shamash was the sun disk; his acolyte, the bullman, was often seen holding the sun-disk standard (Fig. 16). Sippar was the city where Shamash had his great temple (Seal 27).

ISHTAR

Ishtar was the only major female deity in the Mesopotamian pantheon. Originally Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of earth and fertility, the Semitic goddess Ishtar combined the procreative powers of love with the strength and power of war. In the Old Babylonian period Ishtar was portrayed in full battle panoply, with arrow-stuffed quivers slung across her back, raising a lion-headed mace in one hand while the other frequently held a scimitar at her side. She stood full faced, usually in ascending posture with her foot on the back of a lion or a lion-headed bird. Her symbols included the rosette and the lion (Seal 29).

NERGAL

Nergal, a vegetation deity, was the god of the netherworld, and his consort Ershkigala was the ruler of the realm of the dead. As the god of death, war, destruction, disease, famine, and retribution, Nergal's principal attribute was the scimitar, sometimes with a lion-head terminal. He often appeared with Shamash, an association also known in cuneiform texts of the period. The lion, the lion griffin, and the lion-



FIG. 16 Cylinder carved in relief with deities approaching Shamash between guarded gates. Alabaster. Reportedly found at Geoy Tepe in northwestern Iran; Old Babylonian period, early 2nd millennium B.C. H. 9.5 cm. Purchase, 1886, 86.11.1

headed demon were Nergal's minions, and it is they, not the god, who were portrayed as killers on the seals. The city devoted to Nergal was Cuthah, in Akkad (Seal 28).

THE WEATHER GOD

Beginning with the Akkadian period, Adad, the weather god who brought life-giving rains as well as devastating storms, was shown riding on the back of a winged, fire-spitting lion griffin. Later he often held a lightning fork with bent prongs and was represented either standing in ascending posture or riding on the lion griffin or on a bull. In Seal 33 he appears with an unidentified god carrying a three-headed mace, a symbol associated with warlike traits. The weather god was worshiped widely throughout the Near East. In Mesopotamia one of the cities of the god was Enegi, near Ur (Seals 32, 33).

THE MAN WITH A MACE

This figure was first seen in the Old Babylonian period. His tunic and brimmed cap differentiate him from images of the major gods and connect him instead with those of rulers. He was usually pictured standing in profile facing right, occasionally on a stepped dais or with his foot on the back of a fallen enemy, and holding a mace close to his body. The identity of this figure has received a great deal of scholarly attention. It has been suggested recently that this figure is an *utukku*, or powerful spirit, that may embody the ancestral king. The victorious and divine Naram Sin of the earlier Akkadian dynasty was depicted in the same posture holding a bow at his

waist on a well-known stele, now in the Louvre, that was erected at Sippar during the Old Babylonian period; such an image could have been the prototypal ancestral ruler. The man with a mace was often presented with a suppliant goddess and/or with Ishtar. A curious and as yet unexplained feature of this figure is his wind-blown beard (Seals 29–31).

THE SUPPLIANT GODDESS

The goddess Lama mediated between gods and men, providing protection and assistance to the faithful. She appeared frequently on Old Babylonian seals in the company of all the major deities. She was also often seen in her characteristic bent-arm gesture of entreaty facing the man with a mace. Representations of Lama are known in many media in the second millennium. In addition to small statues in her image, there are charms for jewelry and relief representations on steles (Seals 27–30 and Fig. 17).

THE NUDE FEMALE

The nude female appeared for the first time on Old Babylonian seals. Usually placed in a subsidiary position, she stood frontally, sometimes on a pedestal, with her hands under her breasts. Although her identity and divine nature are not fully understood, she probably had a protective, apotropaic role, perhaps ensuring fertility and productivity. From the Third Dynasty of Ur until the fall of Babylon, clay plaques with her image in relief were extremely popular; they have been found in burial sites, temples, and domestic habitations (Seals 31, 33).

THE CONTEST SCENE

The contest scene of bullmen, nude heroes, and wild animals, conceived at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period, was always part of the glyptic repertory. In the Akkadian period these scenes usually presented pairs of animals and heroic figures. Nearly disappearing during the Neo-Sumerian period, the contest regained some of its popularity in the Old Babylonian period (Seal 34). New to the contest genre at this time were two closely related motifs, both illustrated on Seal 35. One element depicts a hero turning back his head and kneeling, sometimes on a knoll, while under attack by a lion griffin; the other motif shows a goat on a knoll sitting on its haunches while attacked by a lion griffin or by lions. The significance of this combination of motifs is unknown, but the fact that they share certain features suggests that they may refer to a related theme. The lion griffin that appears in both scenes was associated with Nergal, the god of the underworld; perhaps this imagery evokes the destructive force of the god when turned against his own people and their herds.



FIG. 17 Necklace with pendants in the form of deities and symbols of deities. Gold. Southern Mesopotamia, ca. 19th–18th century B.C. L. 43 cm. Fletcher Fund, 1947, 47.1a–h

BACTRIA IN THE BRONZE AGE

BY THE THIRD millennium B.C. much of the Near East had long been settled by people living in villages and towns, growing grain, herding sheep and goats, and hunting local fauna. Far to the northeast of Mesopotamia, in the piedmont and steppe lands of western Central Asia, an urban social system evolved from the indigenous village cultures of the fifth and fourth millennia. Soviet investigations at Namazga Tepe and Altyn Tepe, two of the largest sites in the valley drained by the Atrek River, have given us an architectural sequence and a stratified ceramic corpus distinguished by its early bold, geometrically painted polychrome pottery.

During the Namazga IV period (about 3000–2500 B.C.) the size of both sites increased tenfold, while the villages were for the most part deserted. This same pattern of agglomeration of population had occurred more than half a millennium earlier in southern Mesopotamia during the Uruk period of urbanization. Inside the magnificent and massive fortification wall of Early Bronze Age Altyn Tepe were simple craftsmen's quarters—where potters, metalsmiths, and stone masons worked—as well as elaborate quarters that presumably housed the elite. Technological innovations ranging from those as fundamental as the wheel to complex smelting and casting metallurgical techniques and the fast wheel for turning pottery were employed during this period, just as they had been in Mesopotamia during the Late Uruk period.

The complexity of the social structure and technology continued to increase during the subsequent period of Namazga V (2500–2200 B.C.), even though the population apparently decreased. In those levels of excavation extensive evidence for a specialized cult was found, including a monumental stepped structure with a niched facade placed next to a grave complex that contained a number of burials with rich funerary goods, some decorated with images that have been interpreted as symbols of the cult.

This piedmont urban culture, which dissipated at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, shared a number of traits with its western neighbors, among them monumental architecture, craft specialization, social and economic differentiation, and long-distance contacts. One fundamental difference between them, however, was that while a primitive system of incised signs was used to mark pottery and female figurines, no actual system of writing was ever developed, which in Mesopotamia had been so important to the development of the glyptic arts. Its absence prevents the certain identification of the ethnic or language groups of these people.

The first seals to be used in the region were stone stamp seals of the Namazga III period (3500–3000 B.C.). Cruciform, rectangular, or square in shape and carrying

geometric designs rendered by a drill or a graver, they were impressed on clay sealings as well as on ceramic vessels. Late in the Namazga IV period and increasingly throughout Namazga V, these stone seals were replaced by ones of other shapes (Seal 37) and by stamp seals made of a copper alloy (Seal 38). The imagery on these distinctive metal stamps was constructed of compartments defined by bronze strips. Although some figural imagery is known (Fig. 18), the designs of these compartmented metal stamp seals were usually geometric with patterns based on the cross or the circle. Scanty evidence exists for the way in which these bronze stamps were actually used. At Altyn Tepe they were reportedly found in graves, placed near the thighs of the deceased. In central southern Iran, where bronze seals and pins with compartmented decoration are known in the contemporaneous cemetery at Shahdad, their impressions were found on ceramic vessels. To the east, at Shahr-i Sokhta, their impressions appeared on clay sealings.

Beginning in the Namazga V period and continuing into the first half of the second millennium, the lands east of the Atrek River basin were settled. Occupation has been documented by excavation and survey both in the oasis of the deltaic plain of the Murghab River and farther east in Bactria, today southern Turkmenistan and northeastern Afghanistan. To date, the glyptic traditions with the most elaborate iconography come from these regions.

Stamp seals similar to Seals 39–42 have been found in excavations and surveys at the site of Kelleli. These stamps, often carved from soft, dark green steatite or chlorite, were usually shaped like rectangular cushions, with a hole for suspension drilled laterally. They were carved on both sides with figural images that usually alternated in their orientation.



FIG. 18 Compartmented stamp seal of a male figure (deity?) with lightning shafts or snakes. Copper alloy. Northern Afghanistan, early 2nd millennium B.C. L. 9.1 cm. David L. Klein, Jr. Memorial Foundation, Inc. and Lester Wolfe (by exchange) Gifts, 1984, 1984.4

The iconography of this type of stamp seal is quite specific. From the natural world, birds of prey, wild boars, writhing snakes, and plants were the most common images; from the realm of myth came the reptilian-headed, feline-bodied, winged, horned, and bearded dragon, which was also known in the Old Elamite world of western Iran. A heroic male figure who is occasionally winged or bird-headed is often associated with this fantastic dragon. On a seal from Kelleli similar to Seal 39 he is shown dominating snakes. This ancient posture, seen first in the fourth-millennium cultures of western Iran and northern Mesopotamia, may have come to western Central Asia through the steatite-carving tradition of the third-millennium Iranian plateau.

As we have seen throughout the Near East, the images on seals frequently appeared on other objects, often symbolic in function. The images of Seals 39 and 40 are combined in a sculpted ceremonial ax cast in solid silver and embellished with gold foil (Fig. 19). Depicted in three-dimensional relief, the hero, with a double bird's head, talons, and wings, struggles with the fantastic dragon on one side and with a wild boar on the other. Although we may never know the precise meaning of these motifs, they probably had the same meaning on both the seals and the ax. They give to us the world of the Central Asians, one full of powerful heroes and terrifying monsters, images quite distant from the anthropomorphized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic world of the Mesopotamian kings and gods.

The Central Asian stamp seals were cut in two styles. Many of the simpler ones were cut with a drill (Seals 37, 42). The strongest and most complex images were carved in a flat relief articulated with bold linear engraving: muscles, hair, facial features, veins in the leaves, and feathers on the wings were all defined by line (Seals 39–41). The general style of carving as well as many specific details, including the beta shape defining the feline's shoulder, are reminiscent of devices used in the earlier glyptic work of the Proto-Elamite period, a culture that flourished in southwestern and highland Iran shortly after 3000 B.C. Whether this likeness is simply formal or is the result of direct or indirect early contact between these two distant people must be resolved by further controlled investigations. Nonetheless, it is interesting that details found in Proto-Elamite art are also found on the pottery of the contemporaneous Namazga II and III levels.

Another type of seal, known from the Margiana region of the Murghab delta, is the stamp cylinder with a loop for suspension at the top. Undoubtedly inspired by its Mesopotamian counterpart and perhaps transmitted indirectly through the Harappan culture of the Indus Valley, these stamp cylinders were engraved on both their cylindrical sides and their flat bases. Impressions of these stamp cylinders have been found on pottery at the site of Taip, along with actual seals. It is possible that this distinctive seal form was the source for the stamp cylinders found in Hittite and Urartian cultures in Anatolia.

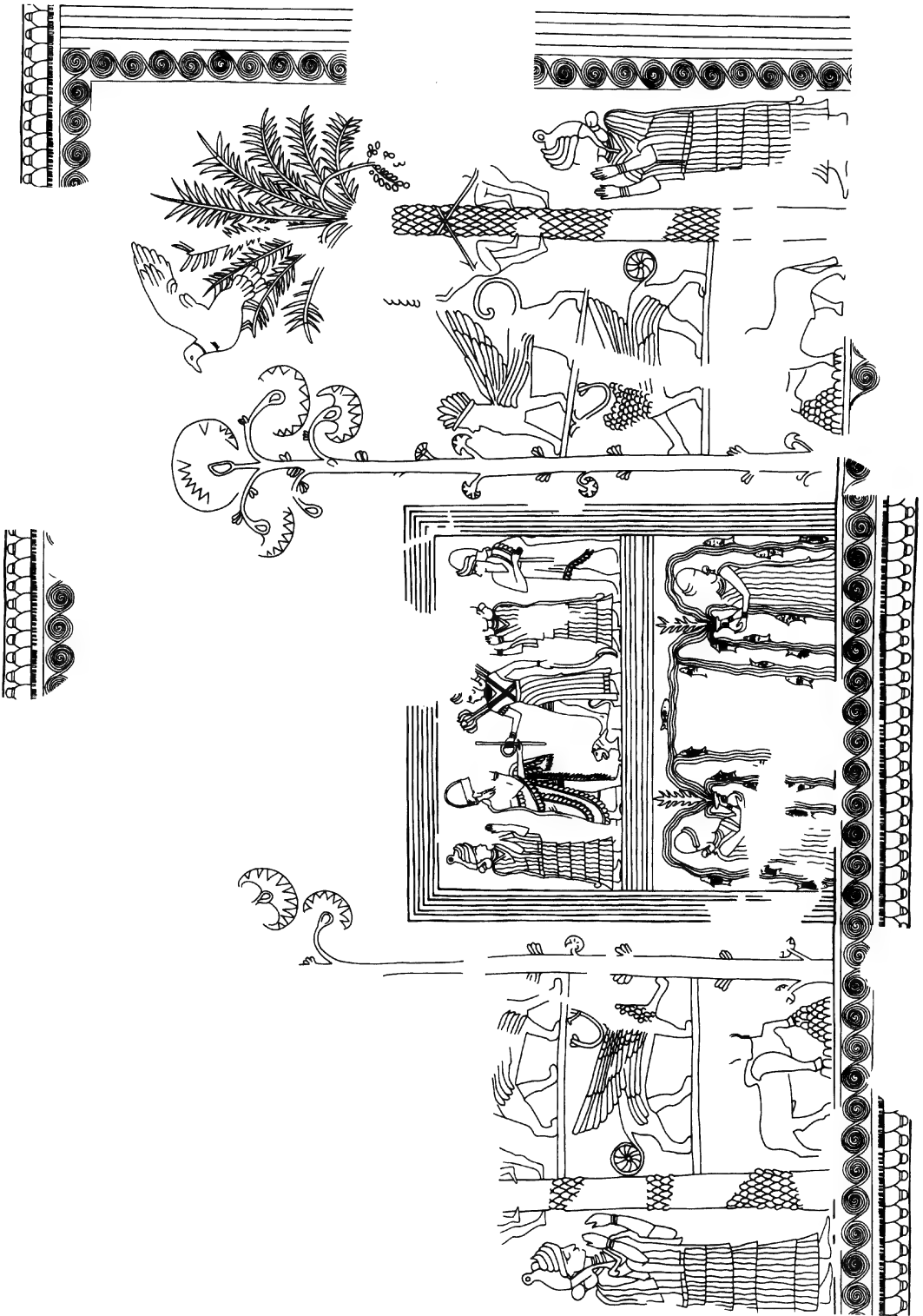
The stamp cylinder seals have a different iconography than do stamp seals. Scenes on cylinders show sheep and goats, humped bulls, Bactrian camels, and humans



FIG. 19 Shaft-hole ax with a bird-headed demon, a boar, and a winged dragon. Silver with gold foil. Northern Afghanistan, ca. 2000–1700 B.C. L. 15 cm. Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, James N. Spear and Schimmel Foundation, Inc. Gifts, 1982, 1982.5

together with snakes, birds of prey, and wild boars. Like the stamp seals, they are carved in two different styles: drilled and engraved. Seal 43 provides a fine sample of the drilled cylinder style, showing the images alternating in a manner similar to stamp seals.

In the Persian Gulf a different tradition of seal cutting dominated about 1900 B.C., influenced by the linear style of the early second-millennium Old Elamite culture (see Seal 25), which had its centers at Susa in the Iranian lowland and at Anshan in the highland province of Fars. Excavations at sites on the islands of Bahrein and Failaika have revealed distinctive stamp seals with circular sealing faces and hemispherical bosses engraved with central lines and concentric circles, a shape derived from the Harappan civilization of the Indus Valley. Seal 46, an excellent example of this Persian Gulf type, shows two human figures with animals and a goat associated with a grid pattern, perhaps indicating some kind of architecture. The floating composition and the lively linear carving are typical of this style. Impressions of seals of this type have been found on a tablet dated to the reign of Gungunum, ruler of Larsa from 1932–1906 B.C., discovered at the Mesopotamian city of Ur.



ANCIENT SYRIA: CENTERS OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

IN AN AREA that corresponds roughly with the boundaries of modern Syria and Lebanon, there arose in the early second millennium B.C. many centers of culture that maintained contacts with lands both to the east and the west. This was a time of population movement. Amorites, western Semites, established their control over Assyria and Babylonia; Assyrian, Syrian, and Babylonian trading missions were set up in central Anatolian towns; and there was a strong Egyptian cultural and political presence along the Levantine coast.

A major link between Mesopotamian and Syrian cultures occurred where the Euphrates River flows between Babylonia and the northeastern Habur Plains, at the great emporium of Mari, whose royal palace was famous throughout the Levant. Extending over six acres, the enormous complex at Mari was both a royal residence and an administrative center, with workshops, storage areas, and archives. The economic texts of its last ruler, Zimrilim (about 1781–1758 B.C.), document the importation of precious stones and tin from the east and of copper from Alashiya (often identified as Cyprus). Goods then flowed west, to coastal sites such as Ugarit, to reach the Mediterranean market.

The Mari archives dating from the early eighteenth century B.C. provide us with impressions of the finest seals produced in Syria, which reflect both the style and the syntax of paintings that decorated the palace walls (Fig. 20). These seals combine a delicately modeled style with a restraint and order in composition that evoke the term “classical” and show a mastery of the best Old Babylonian glyptic style inter-

FIG. 20 Wall painting from Mari Palace with a scene of royal investiture, goddesses with streams, and mythological creatures in a landscape. Syria; period of Zimrilim, ca. 1781–1758 B.C. Drawing after J. Lauffray in A. Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari, Volume II, Part 2: Peintures murales* (Paris, 1958), pl. A, and P. Amiet, *Art of the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1977), pl. 65

FIG. 21 Royal figures facing a suppliant goddess, with the inscription of Matrunna, daughter of Aplahanda, king of Carchemish. Cylinder-seal impression (modern). Syria; Classic Syrian I, 1800–1750 B.C. H. 2.4 cm. Collection of Mrs. William H. Moore, Lent by Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., 1955, L.55.49.139



preted with greater volume and stronger curved lines (Fig. 21). In these images, Mesopotamian fringed garments have rounded borders and caps are fuller. A single ground line is not always observed (Seals 48, 51), particularly for terminal motifs, which are often separated by a guilloche band and arranged in horizontal registers. Contemporary with classical Mari-style glyptic work are other seals from coastal centers (Seal 49). Differences exist among the individual schools of carving, but all of these seals share, to some degree, the characteristics of the Syrian aesthetic as demonstrated by the products of the Mari court. This period of seal production, the first half of the eighteenth century, is termed Classic Syrian I. The style replaced a more linear one known to us from tablet envelopes impressed with seals of Syrian merchants who came to Anatolia in the nineteenth century B.C. This earlier phase is termed the Old Syrian II period (see Seal 47).

The history of Mari is closely tied to affairs in another center of power farther west, the great kingdom of Yamhad, whose capital city of Halab probably lies under modern Aleppo. This kingdom was able to retain its independence and position of importance throughout a period of growing Assyrian power and expansion in the nineteenth century B.C. and exercised control over such important coastal towns as Ugarit and Alalakh. When the Assyrian king Shamsi-Adad I (about 1813–1781 B.C.) established his empire in northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia, he gained control of major caravan routes by displacing the local ruler Zimrilim and installing his son as ruler of Mari. The influence of Shamsi-Adad seems to have extended into central Anatolia, where we find sealings inscribed with his name in a palace excavated at Acemhöyük. It is only with the death of Shamsi-Adad I that Zimrilim, a refugee at the court of Yamhad, was able to regain control of Mari, which he ruled until its destruction by Hammurabi of Babylon in about 1758 B.C.

Hammurabi maintained cordial relations with Yamhad, as caravans traveling to the Levant had to traverse this kingdom to avoid the long desert route. Furthermore, Yamhad probably controlled the eastward flow of goods from the Mediterranean through its vassal city of Alalakh. Indeed, our main documentation for the kingdom of Yamhad survives in the archives of the level VII palace at Alalakh (about 1720–1650 B.C.). Many of these documents are impressed with cylinder seals in a style that has been termed Classic Syrian II (Seals 54–59). It differs from that of the Mari sealings in a more “baroque” treatment of human figures and garments, expressed in the use of stronger curves, deeper modeling, and a new robe with thickly rolled borders. A much closer connection with other Mediterranean cultures is evident as well. Egyptianizing motifs are prominent, a phenomenon found not only at Alalakh but also at the inland site of Ebla (Seals 55, 56). While it has been suggested that the royal seals of Alalakh were probably produced in the capital city of Aleppo, certain seals in the rather diverse “Aleppo Group,” which include human and animal figures reminiscent of Aegean art (Seal 59), could have been made at a coastal site such as Ugarit, where Cretans came to trade for Near Eastern raw materials.

Both the vassal city of Alalakh and the great kingdom of Yamhad were destroyed by Hittites from Anatolia prior to the sack of Babylon in 1595 B.C. There followed a “dark age” of more than a century; events in the history of Late Bronze Age Syria have become known to us largely with the discovery of the archives in level IV of the palace at Alalakh. The tablets, which date primarily to the fifteenth century B.C., identify Idrimi and his son Niqmepa, kings of Alalakh, as vassals of the northern Mesopotamian state of Mitanni. This enemy of Egypt figures prominently in the struggle for the control of the Levant as recorded in the annals of the pharaoh Tuthmosis III (about 1504–1450 B.C.). The Alalakh archive is also a major source for impressions of seals in the Syro-Mitannian style. This style uses motifs and compositions of Syrian (and Babylonian) ancestry but achieves a more abstract effect in its symmetrical arrangement of groups of figures and in its combination of the native modeled style with a drilled technique best known at the Mitannian site of Nuzi (Seals 60–62).

The final phase of Late Bronze Age Syria is marked by a shift in the balance of power, as Hittite monarchs from Anatolia destroyed the Mitannian empire and became the overlords of northern Syrian towns, among them Ugarit. In this period we have evidence for the presence of many foreigners, including Hittites, Egyptians, Canaanites, and perhaps Aegeans at Ugarit, a thriving emporium that was destroyed in a great fire at the beginning of the twelfth century B.C. Inscribed tablets, written in a Canaanite dialect using the native cuneiform alphabet, included a rich collection of literary texts that reveal a distinctly Canaanite pantheon apparently already developed by the early second millennium B.C. These myths emphasize a concern with the forces of nature in the form of deities of weather and war and love and fertility, ruled by their divine lord El. The texts serve to elucidate the depictions on seals, where religious ritual is, to some extent, couched in the artistic language of Mesopotamia (Seals 57, 58). Although their narratives were not the subject for the seal carver, descriptions in the Ugaritic texts, along with the names of gods in the Alalakh archives, help to identify the rulers of the divine and human realms in Syrian religion and society.

Deities and Rulers on Syrian Seals

THE SYRIAN GODDESS WITH THE SQUARE MITER

Appearing on seals especially of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries B.C., the goddess wears a square headdress with two profile horns of divinity and a long, wrapped mantle with thick borders, which may be fringed, over a thinner undergarment. She extends her right arm with hand raised, often holding a cup or an ankh

symbol. Rarely she holds a weapon, and a bird may perch on her shoulder. She may be approached by the king, and on Seal 59 she appears with two deities, perhaps representing love and war. Her most distinctive attribute is her hat, which resembles the rectangular headdresses worn by Anatolian mother goddesses in both the second and first millennia. Her important position on seals indicates that she is a primary goddess, either Hapat or Ishtar-Ishara, both of whom are mentioned in the Alalakh texts. Later Ugaritic literature identifies Asherah, the consort of El, as the mother who is “progenitress of the gods” and who, along with the goddess Anath, acts as their “wet nurse” (H. L. Ginsberg, “Ugaritic Myths, Epics and Legends,” in J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [Princeton, 1969], pp. 131, 146).

THE NUDE GODDESS

Sharing the designation of nude goddess are three distinct figures: one without garments (Seals 53, 59) and two who either lift or draw aside their mantles to reveal their reproductive powers (Seals 52, 56). Other attributes, such as the bull and the ankh symbol, identify these voluptuous females as manifestations of a fertility goddess, full of the promise of life. Combining the functions of lover and mother, they may display one aspect of the Syrian deity Ishtar-Ishara, mentioned in the Alalakh texts, and of the Ugaritic goddesses Asherah and Anath.

THE WINGED AND ARMED GODDESS

Dressed in a long flounced robe open at the front (Seal 47) or later in a short kilt and a conical or square horned miter, this winged figure wields spears and a scimitar (a similar armed but wingless figure wearing the miter of the Syrian goddess appears on Seal 55). Deriving her appearance in part from an earlier Akkadian deity, this goddess has been associated with the death-causing aspect of the maiden goddess of love and war, Anath, in the Ugaritic texts, who “lifts her wings and speeds in flight,” massacres men, and prepares a blood sacrifice (Ginsberg, p. 142). Alalakh texts associate both Hapat and Ishtar-Ishara with weapons and with destruction.

THE WEATHER GOD

Lightning, thunder, and fertilizing rain storms are controlled by the weather god, known in Syria as Baal, consort of Anath, the goddess of love and war. On seals, this Canaanite divine warrior may stand on his mountain of victory, with right arm raised in the Egyptian posture of smiting the enemy. He is associated with the bull, the snake, and the tree, perhaps reinforcing the promise of earthly harvest. He can be recognized by his spiked, horned helmet, a long hair curl, and a short kilt with horizontal lines (Seals 50, 57).

THE MALE FIGURE WITH THE HIGH OVAL HEADDRESS

The close relationship between the divine patriarch El and his earthly counterpart the Syrian king may be expressed in a male figure with a wrapped mantle having thickly rolled borders and wearing a version of the Egyptian white crown (Fig. 22). As the eternal king, he may wear the Mesopotamian horns of divinity or be represented on figurines with the Egyptian atef crown of the divine ancestral king Osiris. As a mortal ruler, this figure may appear in the presence of such deities as the weather god (Seal 57) and the Syrian goddess with the square miter. His appearance is distinct from earlier representations of royalty on Syrian seals, in which the figures retain a form of dress similar to images on the seals of Babylonia (Seal 51). The intimate relationship between king and god may be expressed in Syrian art by the use of the standard Mesopotamian presentation scene (Seal 57). Texts such as the story of King Keret place emphasis on the divine heritage of the ruler and his role as the transmitter of the divine blessing to earth. When King Keret fails to make promised offerings to the gods in return for good fortune, his ensuing illness is accompanied by drought and famine. Only with the intervention of El to speed his recovery does prosperity return to the land. It is in such a context that the confrontation of king and weather god reflects the need to assure the fertility of the land with life-giving rain.



FIG. 22 Male figurine wearing a high oval headdress and a robe with thickly rolled borders. Bronze. Syria, ca. 18th–17th century B.C. H. 17.9 cm. Gift of Sheldon and Barbara Breitbart, 1985, 1985.262.2

THE GREAT EMPIRES OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.

THE HISTORY of the first millennium B.C. is marked by the rise and fall of great imperial powers, which extended their conquests into lands far beyond their borders and, ultimately, their control. The earliest of these was Assyria, the “land of Ashur,” the name of its first urban center. This northern Mesopotamian merchant town, which had become a vassal of the Mitannian empire, gained independence under the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit in the fourteenth century B.C. His successors began the drive to acquire new lands and greater power. The result was an empire that came to dominate Babylon, to conquer the western Aramaic states—thereby gaining access to the Mediterranean—and to overwhelm the kingdom of Urartu to the north.

The great monuments of Assyrian art and architecture were constructed by the empire’s most powerful monarchs in a succession of capital cities: Kalah (Nimrud), Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh (Küyunjik). Nimrud was a city founded in the thirteenth century B.C. and established as the capital of the empire by Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.). His palace in the citadel was decorated with stone wall carvings in low relief with narrative scenes that glorified his rule by illustrating his military conquests, his heroic exploits in the royal hunt, and the acts of royal ceremony and ritual performed by supernatural beings and priests. The Standard Inscription that runs across these bas-reliefs identifies “the palace of Ashurnasirpal . . . priest of Ashur . . . king of the world . . . the king who . . . rules over all mankind; who has acquired dominion over the mountain regions and received their tribute; he takes hostages, triumphs over all the countries from beyond the Tigris to the Lebanon and the Great Sea” (A. Leo Oppenheim, “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 558). The material remains of Assyrian imperialism were found strewn on the palace floors: tributes of bronze and especially of ivory, much of it from western parts of the realm; records of both domestic and military administration; and documents of royal correspondence. Other structures in the capital included the military palace of Shalmaneser III and the temples of Ninurta and Nabu, where large numbers of cuneiform tablets were found.

One culture under strong Assyrian influence was Urartu, centered in a region extending from Lake Van in modern Turkey to the Soviet Republic of Armenia. After an initial period of submission to Assyrian aggressors, the kingdom of Urartu was forged under Sarduri I in about 840 B.C., and a society developed that emulated Assyria in military and political organization as well as in art and literature. Urartu’s

designs on empire were checked in the eighth century by the Cimmerian invasion of 714 B.C. and by a renewed thrust to the north and west by the great Assyrian conquerors Tiglath Pileser III and Sargon II.

Babylon, Hammurabi's capital in the eighteenth century B.C. and later an important Kassite city, remained the cultural center of Mesopotamia despite repeated conquests by Assyria, beginning in the thirteenth century. After isolated rebellions against the Assyrians and alliances with the Elamites of Iran, the Babylonian Chaldean kings accomplished the destruction of Assyria in an alliance with the Medes under Cyaraxes, aided by the Scythians. Ashur, the first Assyrian city, fell in 614 B.C., and Nineveh, the last capital, fell in 612 B.C. Under Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 B.C.), the Babylonian empire not only extended over older Assyrian territories from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf but also over new lands. Its power was short-lived, for in 539 B.C. Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Persian dynasty, assumed the kingship of Babylon.

The Iranian peoples of the early first millennium came into conflict with Assyria during the period of its expansion eastward, which eventually resulted in the destruction by Ashurbanipal of the Elamite capital of Susa in 640 B.C. Following the collapse of the Assyrian empire and the brief period of Babylonian rule, the Achaemenid dynasty came to control an empire, which in periods throughout the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. extended from Greece to India and included Egypt. Such a territorial expansion was matched only by the exploits of the Macedonian Greek ruler Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persians in 331 B.C.

The role of the king and his relationship to the gods in the time of the great empires of the first millennium B.C. is illuminated by references in Assyrian texts and is, to some degree, reflected in the art appearing on seals. Ashurnasirpal II, in his Standard Inscription, assumes the usual royal titles and claims the right to absolute power on earth originating in the blessings of the cosmic deities of the Mesopotamian pantheon. In another text quoted by Henri Frankfort, the monarch expresses his devotion to the goddess of love and war: "O Ishtar, fearsome mistress of the gods . . . thou didst call me to be a shepherd of men, thou didst grant me the scepter of justice" (Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* [Chicago, 1948], p. 239). The goddess assures the king of his right to rule and of victory over his enemies. We are told by Esarhaddon that Ishtar defeated his usurping brothers, "broke their bows and dissolved their battle formation so that they all said: 'This is our king'" (Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* [New Haven and London, 1976], p. 238). Ishtar comforts Ashurbanipal, under threat of Elamite attack, with the offer to deliver his enemy.

This intimate relationship between Ishtar and the king is alluded to in glyptic art by her prominence in images. Often she is represented in her astral aspect as Venus, the morning and evening star. She may be worshiped in the image of a cult statue within a sacred precinct (Seal 70), or she may become manifest in the radiant splendor

of a nimbus of stars (Seal 64). Weapons, a starred headdress, and a ring are her attributes. The goddess is often accompanied by an armed male deity (Seal 64), who has been identified as Adad, the weather god. Adad is also represented, both on a monumental scale in the Ninurta Temple at Nimrud and in miniature on seals (Seal 68) as a male winged figure in scenes of contest against the lion griffin. Other deities are given symbolic representation on Assyrian and Babylonian seals: a crescent standard for the moon god Sin (Seal 64); the dog for Gula, goddess of healing (Seals 74, 75); the stylus for the divine scribe Nabu; and the spade for Nabu's father, Marduk, supreme god of Babylon (Seal 75).

An important role of the Assyrian ruler was that of priest or temple administrator of the god Ashur. This emphasis on a national god, who may have developed as the deification of the earliest Assyrian city, may indicate an order in the divine realm that parallels and reinforces the structure of monarchy on earth. The same concept exists in Babylon, where the god Marduk assumes leadership of the Babylonian pantheon in the battle against the chaotic forces threatening the cosmos, as described in the Epic of Creation. The rivalry between the military power, Assyria, and the cultural center, Babylonia, was expressed in the religious sphere not only by repeated thefts of the statue of Marduk by the Assyrians, but also by their attempt to delegate the universal authority of this deity to the god Ashur. An inscription of Sargon II

FIG. 23 Relief from the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace with king and winged genii performing a rite at the sacred tree in the presence of a god in winged disk. Alabaster. Nimrud, Northern Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C. H. 1.78 m. British Museum, London. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum





FIG. 24 Plaque from Fort Shalmaneser with a winged figure slaying a griffin. Ivory. Nimrud, Northern Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian period, ca. 8th century B.C., North Syrian style. H. 10.5 cm. Rogers Fund, 1961, 61.197.11

reads, “Ashur, father of the gods . . . king of the whole heaven and earth . . . to whom . . . Marduk submitted the gods of the level land and the mountains . . . to pay homage to him” (Jacobsen, p. 234).

The monumental art of the palaces focuses on king and empire in depictions of war, the royal hunt, and the enactment of rituals by protective supernatural creatures who may ensure the fertility of the sacred tree (Fig. 23). On seals these themes are also expressed in similar scenes (Seal 66), and the prosperity of the realm may be ensured by the presence of the national god Ashur, within a winged sun disk. The seals and other minor arts may contain excerpted isolated motifs from narrative accounts of war but more often express conquest in symbolic terms, with supernatural beings combating monstrous enemies (Fig. 24). Such contests may become specific, and the triad of two heroes or benevolent demons battling a central beast in human or bovine form has been identified with the defeat of Humbaba, the monster of the cedar forest in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Seals 69, 72).

Seals reveal the story of political and cultural domination during the time of the great empires in the first millennium B.C. through the transfer of artistic motifs and styles from major cultural centers to peripheral areas. The earlier cylinders and later stamp seals of Assyria and Babylonia exhibit four distinct styles:

1. The linear style. By using a pointed graver on soft materials, Assyrian artists of the ninth to eighth centuries B.C. created contest, ritual, and mythological scenes in a style with flat, linear figures that relate both to earlier Kassite glyptic work and to the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (Seal 63).

2. The drilled style. Drillings replace the linear definition of features on the hard stone seals in this style (Seals 64–66). The finest examples were favored by Assyrian

court officials in the ninth to eighth centuries. A coarser drilled style occurs in Assyria and then Babylonia through the sixth to fifth centuries.

3. The cut style. Straight, thin, shallow incisions produced with a rotating cutting disk created schematic versions of earlier linear-style themes on Assyrian and Babylonian hard stone cut-style seals of the eighth to seventh centuries (Seal 67). This style may have derived from glyptic work of the thirteenth to twelfth centuries and first comes into use in Babylonia in the ninth to eighth centuries.

4. The modeled style. The finest seals exhibit delicately modeled figures in a style that derives from earlier Middle Assyrian glyptic work. Preceded by a less well documented Babylonian phase (tenth to ninth centuries), of which Seal 68 may be a rare example, the modeled style was favored in the late eighth to seventh centuries for the rendering of contests and scenes of worship (Seals 70–73). It may relate to the sculptural style of relief decoration in the palace of Sargon at Khorsabad.

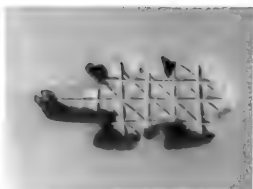
These styles are reflected in the seals made in secondary centers, where they were often combined with distinctive regional features. In contrast to the static figures of Urartian art (Seal 91), for example, the animals on Syrian seals are dynamic (Seal 85), and Phoenician products exhibit Egyptian influence (Seal 83). Within these various regions distinctive seal forms and materials were also used, among them the loop-handled metal or stone stamp and stamp cylinder seals of Urartu (Seals 88–92) and the scaraboid, conoid, and pyramidal stamp seals in Syria (Seals 83–86). A number of themes found on official cylinder seals from Achaemenid Persia, such as the king hunting or dominating lions and monsters, derive from Mesopotamia. Distinctively Achaemenid features, however, are the tucked-and-gathered candys garment and royal tiara, worn also by the deity in a winged sun disk (Seals 78–80); the open-jawed winged lion (Seal 86), which may have an ibex horn; and rampant animals, both in contest and in heraldic scenes, with their forelegs raised and heads turned back to form a dramatic body curve (Seal 81). When found on Syrian seals, such themes reflect the extent of Persian cultural as well as political domination of its western provinces (Seal 86).

CHECKLIST

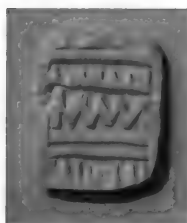
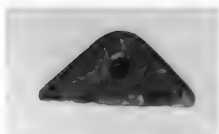
THE SEALS included in this checklist are gifts to the Museum from Martin and Sarah Cherkasky, with the exception of catalogue numbers 7, 23, 43, 54, 57, 59, and 70, all of which are long-term loans.

All measurements are given in millimeters. For stamp seals, the measurements of length (the horizontal dimension) and width (the vertical dimension) measure the seal face; height measures the thickness of the seal itself.

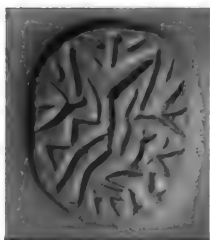
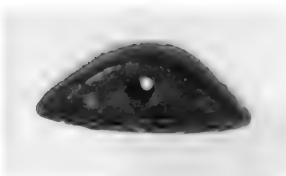
Descriptions begin with the main figure, when it is identifiable. If not, they proceed from right to left. The presence of inscriptions is noted in the description; for transliterations and translations, see page 79.



1



2



3



4



1. Hedgehog-shaped stamp seal

Northern Mesopotamia or Syria; Halaf, mid-6th millennium B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 14 mm., L. 26 mm., W. 11 mm.

Two grid patterns superposed; a chevron pattern with a central line under the animal's head.

1986.311.1

2. Pyramidal stamp seal

Northern Mesopotamia or Syria; late 5th–early 4th millennium B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 8 mm., L. 16 mm., W. 20 mm.

Two rows of interlocking triangles; hatched border top and bottom.

1987.96.13

3. Carinated hemispheroid stamp seal

Northern Mesopotamia, Syria, or southwestern Iran; Gawra XII–X, ca. 4000–3500 B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 11 mm., L. 22 mm., W. 26 mm.

Human figure with pinhead, chevron torso, and three fingers flanked by snakes. To the right, quadrupeds and a plant(?). In the field, two markings.

1983.314.14

4. Rectangular-plaque stamp seal

Northern Mesopotamia or Iran; Late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 5 mm., L. 58 mm., W. 30 mm.

Mouflon(?) stands facing right before an upside-down bird. Above, a human figure in birthing position(?). Behind, a vertical line with five horizontals and a bird.

1983.314.17

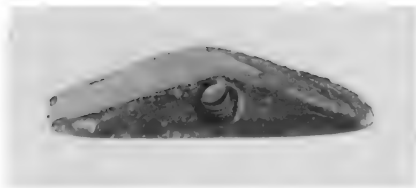
5. Gabled stamp seal

Northern Syria or southeastern Anatolia; Amuq G, ca. 3600–3000 B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 9 mm., L. 46 mm., W. 39 mm.

Sheep striding right. In the field, branches.

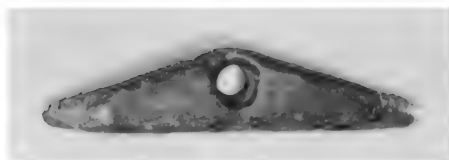
1983.314.16



5

6. Gabled stamp seal

Northern Syria or southeastern Anatolia; Amuq G,
ca. 3600–3000 B.C.
Steatite or chlorite; H. 12 mm., L. 52 mm., W. 44 mm.
Two boars tête-bêche. In the field, a plant.
1983.314.15



7. Stamp seal sculpted as a squatting female wearing a diadem

Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/
Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.
Rhodocrosite; H. 10 mm., L. 23 mm., W. 30 mm.
Eight groups of drill holes with pointed projections,
probably schematic dogs.
L.1983.125.5



6

8. Recumbent-ram stamp seal

Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/
Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.
Marble; H. 22 mm., L. 39 mm., W. 27 mm.
Two dogs with raised tails and pointed ears; damaged
area.
1983.314.18

9. Lion-head stamp seal with holes for inlay on the face

Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/
Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.
Black marble; H. 15 mm., L. 45 mm., W. 37 mm.
Three crouching felines. In the field, drillings.
1987.96.16

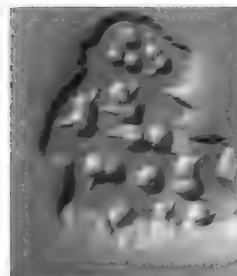


10. Hemispheroid stamp seal

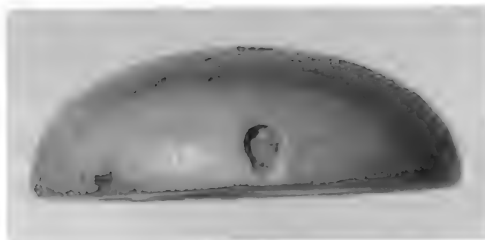
Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/
Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.
Marble; H. 16 mm., Diam. 48 mm.
Three dogs(?) circle around a central small animal.
1987.96.14

11. Fish-shaped stamp seal

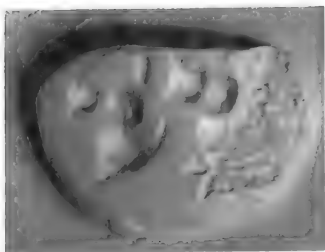
Mesopotamia or northern Syria; Late Uruk/Jemdet
Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.
Marble; H. 7 mm., L. 36 mm., W. 21 mm.
A caprid facing left. Below and perpendicular, a second
caprid.
1987.96.19



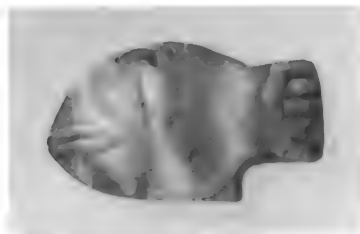
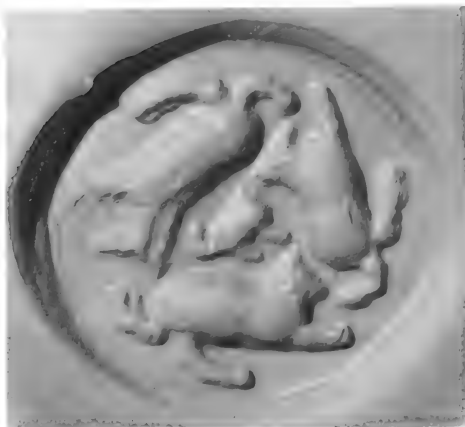
7



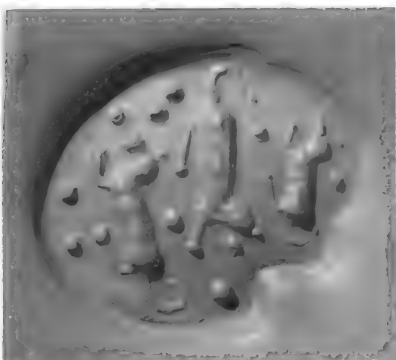
8



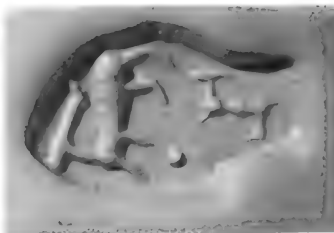
10



9



11



12. Recumbent-bovid stamp seal

Southwestern Iran(?); early 3rd millennium B.C.(?)

Bituminous limestone; H. 15 mm., L. 33 mm.,

W. 19 mm.

Eleven-pointed star with central dot.

1983.103

13. Square-plaque stamp seal

Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/

Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.

Pink marble; H. 9 mm., L. 25 mm., W. 24 mm.

Human feet tête-bêche, one with five toes, the other with four.

1985.192.25

14. Cylinder seal

Southern Mesopotamia; Late Uruk, ca. 3500–3100 B.C.

Bituminous limestone; H. 38 mm., Diam. 24 mm.

Three nude male figures approach a temple at left. The first pours from a vessel into a rectangular container; the second is partially obscured by damage; the third raises a vessel(?) in his clasped hands. In the field, a sheep, two unidentified rectangular forms, a container, a footed cup, and a beaker(?).

1983.314.1

15. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia or southwestern Iran; Late Uruk/

Jemdet Nasr, ca. 3500–2900 B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 14 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Two pig-tailed ladies sit back to back. To the right, four containers with loop handles. To the left, a pole on a rectangular base with a spherical terminal and two loops, probably part of a loom. Above, a horizontal ladder pattern and three containers, two with loop handles.

1984.383.2

16. Cylinder seal (broken and refinished in antiquity)

Mesopotamia; Early Dynastic I “brocade” style,

ca. 2900–2750 B.C.

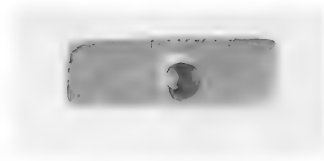
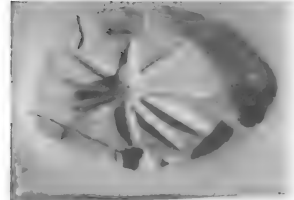
Marble; H. 54 mm., Diam. 22 mm.

A quadruped above a group of converging lines faces two frogs separated by an X (only the right legs of the lower frog remain) and a bird with spread wings. A double-line border top and bottom.

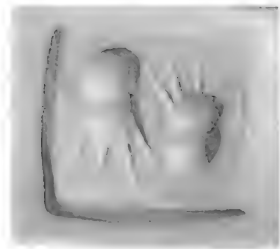
1983.314.3



12

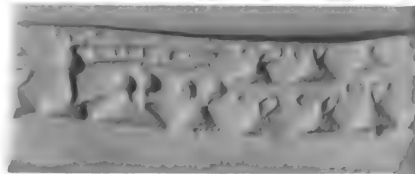


13





14



15



16

17. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Jemdet Nasr or Early Dynastic I,
ca. 3100–2750 B.C.

Marble; H. 37 mm., Diam. 13 mm.

Three outlined lozenges stacked vertically between bordered zigzag dividers; second panel with two outlined lozenges below two staggered chevrons joined by horizontal lines.

1986.311.36

18. Cylinder seal

Southern Mesopotamia; Early Dynastic IIIa,
ca. 2600–2500 B.C.

Lapis lazuli; H. 18 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Nude hero wrestles two caprids rampant with heads reversed; nude hero combats lion crossed by bull, both with heads reversed. Terminal: a scorpion below two horizontal lines, marking space for an inscription.

1984.383.7

17

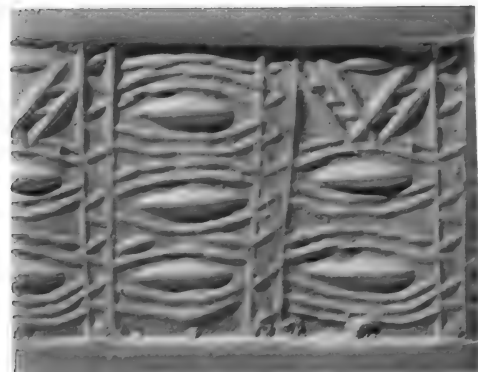


19. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Early Dynastic IIIa, ca. 2600–2500 B.C.
Marble; H. 25 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

A goddess wearing a long robe and a single-horned miter sits on a stool and raises her right arm. In front of her are two branches and three figures in short skirts carrying boxes on their heads toward two similarly clad figures placing a box on a four-tiered altar. Above, a crescent over a sun disk, a scorpion, a quadruped, and a lion.

1984.383.5



20. Cylinder seal

Syria; Early Dynastic, ca. 2500 B.C.
Black marble(?); H. 27 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Figure with arms raised kneeling before a table supporting a reversed quadruped. A feline stands behind. Serrated border top and bottom.

1987.96.3

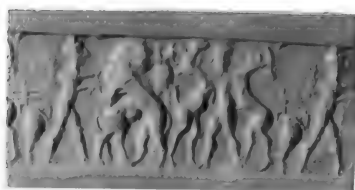
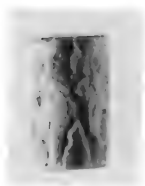
21. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Late Akkadian, ca. 2254–2154 B.C.
Jasper; H. 36 mm., Diam. 23 mm.

Nude bearded hero with six curls wrestles a rampant water buffalo; bullman wrestles a rampant lion. Terminal: a frame for an erased inscription above a lion crouching to the left.

1986.311.37

18



19



20



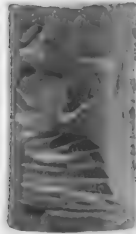
21



22



23



22. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Late Akkadian, ca. 2254–2154 B.C.
Steatite or chlorite; H. 19 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

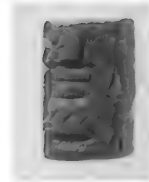
Figure wearing a long robe and with right arm extended sits before a laden table on a box stool beneath a sun disk in moon crescent. Approaching are two robed figures, each with the left hand raised. Terminal: a tree.
1984.383.9



23. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Ur III, ca. 2112–2004 B.C.
Hematite; H. 28 mm., Diam. 17 mm.

Figure wearing a flounced robe and a brimmed cap and holding a cup in his extended right hand sits on a padded stool beneath a sun disk in moon crescent. Approaching is a goddess leading a baldheaded worshiper. An eight-line framed inscription.
L.1986.47.34

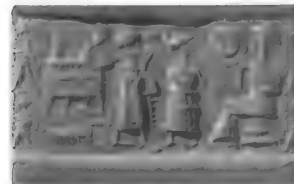


24

24. Cylinder seal

Anatolia; Old Assyrian Colony period, Old Assyrian style, ca. 1920–1840 B.C.
Hematite; H. 18 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

Figure wearing a flounced robe and a striated cap and extending its right hand sits on a padded stool beneath a sun disk in moon crescent. Approaching are a suppliant goddess and a worshiper. Terminal: a bull god above a scorpion and two small nude males.
1986.311.41





25



25. Cylinder seal

Southwestern Iran; Old Elamite, 19th–18th century B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 13 mm.

God wearing a fringed robe and a miter with turned-out horns and raising his right hand sits on a box throne beneath a moon crescent. Approaching are an introducing goddess followed by a suppliant goddess. A nude goddess stands frontally on a pedestal. In the field, a ball staff and a wedge. A three-line framed inscription. 1987.96.4



26



26. Cylinder seal

Southwestern Iran; Old Elamite, 18th–17th century B.C.

Hematite; H. 19 mm., Diam. 9 mm.

God wearing a fringed robe and a square-topped miter with turned-out horns and holding a curved palm frond stands before a worshiper with outstretched arms. Between them are a rampant caprid and a branch(?). A three-line framed inscription. 1986.311.43

27. Cylinder seal

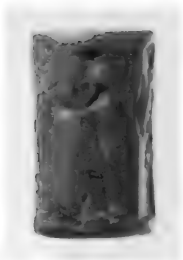
Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.

Hematite; H. 23 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

Sun god wearing a flounced robe and a single-horned miter and holding a saw in his extended right hand sits on a double box throne beneath a goat fish. Behind him are a small deity with a plant above a priest. Approaching are a worshiper carrying a kid, a deity clasping both hands at his waist, and a suppliant goddess. In the field, a ball staff. 1985.192.12



27



28



28. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 25 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Sun god in ascending posture receives a goat offering from a worshiper in a ceremonial robe, followed by a suppliant goddess; a deity with a scimitar (Nergal) behind a lion demon holding a captive upside down.
1986.311.39



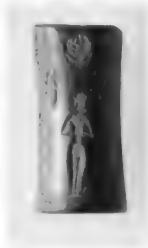
29



29. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 24 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Ishtar wearing an open robe holds a mace in her raised right hand and a scimitar in her left while maces(?) emerge from her shoulders as she stands frontally with one foot on the back of a lion-headed eagle. Facing her, the man with a mace stands on a platform; behind him is a suppliant goddess. A three-line framed inscription.
1987.96.5



30

30. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Suppliant goddess confronts the man with a mace. Between them is a frontal nude goddess below a sun disk in crescent.
1984.383.13



31



31. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 21 mm., Diam. 8 mm.

Figure wearing a pleated robe and extending his right arm stands beneath a moon crescent, facing a man with a mace and a frontal nude goddess. In the field, a monkey, a vessel, and a ball staff.

1984.383.12



32

32. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 28 mm., Diam. 17 mm.

Weather god brandishing a scimitar and a lightning fork stands on the back of a winged fire-breathing dragon. Approaching is a worshiper holding an animal offering. A goddess stands frontally clasping both hands at her waist. In the field, a cow suckling her calf.

1987.96.6

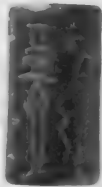


33. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 23 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

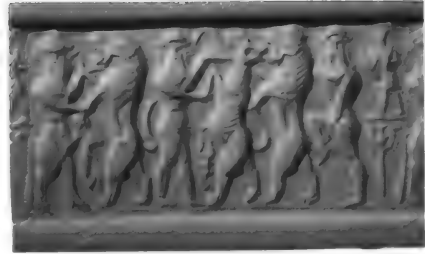
Frontal nude goddess. Both a god with a triple mace (or a plant?) and a weather god with a lightning fork stand in ascending posture, wearing open robes. Approaching these divinities is the man with a mace. In the field, a snake below a star, a monkey, an animal protome, a vessel, and a ball staff.

1983.314.7

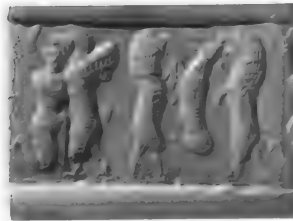


33

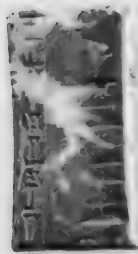
34

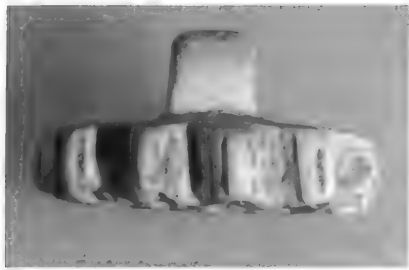


35

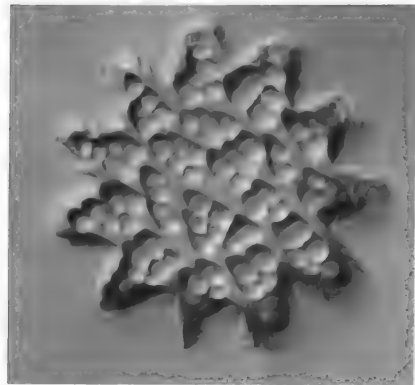


36

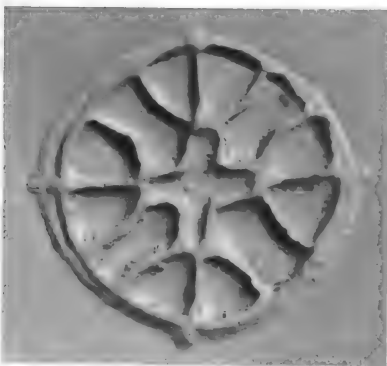
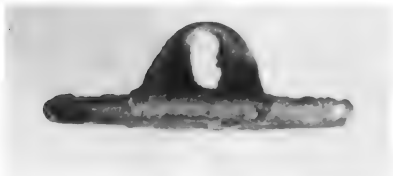




37



38



34. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 25 mm., Diam. 16 mm.

Nude hero with curls wrestles from behind a lion attacking a caprid rampant with head reversed, which in turn is wrestled by a nude hero with curls. A bullman wrestles with a rampant lion. Terminal: a male figure above a lion mace. In the field, a squatting monkey and a bowlegged dwarf.

1983.314.6

35. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Old Babylonian, ca. 1800–1625 B.C.
Hematite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Two rampant lions attack a central caprid rampant with head reversed. A winged lion griffin attacks a kneeling male figure. In the field, a fly.

1985.192.13

36. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Kassite, 1595–1157 B.C.
Jasper; H. 31 mm., Diam. 18 mm.

Two suppliant goddesses (unfinished) flank a three-line framed inscription.

1984.383.14

37. Stamp seal with zigzag edge and pyramidal loop handle

Northern Afghanistan; late 3rd–early 2nd millennium B.C.

Marble; H. 21 mm., Diam. 41 mm.

Pyramidal groups of drillings in the pointed projections at the seal's edge; similar groups of drillings in the central field.

1986.311.4

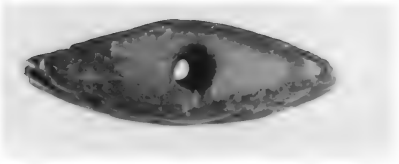
38. Loop-handled compartmented stamp seal

Northern Afghanistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Copper alloy; H. 12 mm., Diam. 37 mm.

Central cross joined to the double-line border by bisected arcs.

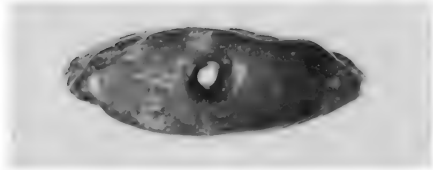
1987.96.28



39



40



40. Cushion-shaped stamp seal engraved on both sides
Southern Turkmenistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 13 mm., L. 46 mm., W. 44 mm.

Obverse, a boar striding toward tulip-shaped flowers.
Reverse, a bird of prey with wings spread, as seen from below, surrounded by a hatched pattern.

1985.192.28

39. Cushion-shaped stamp seal engraved on both sides

Southern Turkmenistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Steatite or chlorite; H. 10 mm., L. 43 mm., W. 47 mm.

Obverse, a nude winged hero dominates writhing snakes. Reverse, a winged dragon strides toward a branch.

1986.311.2

41



41. Cushion-shaped stamp seal engraved on both sides

Southern Turkmenistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Iron and manganese oxide; H. 9 mm., L. 28 mm., W. 23 mm.

Obverse, a striding winged dragon and a snake(?) below. Reverse, a snake writhes behind a plant with a blossom (seed pod?) and two large pipal(?) leaves.

1984.383.29

42. Cushion-shaped stamp seal engraved on both sides

Southern Turkmenistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Azurite; H. 8 mm., L. 23 mm., W. 20 mm.

Obverse, a bird-headed human kneeling to the left and raising both hands. Reverse, a winged dragon.

1985.192.29



43. Loop-handled stamp cylinder seal

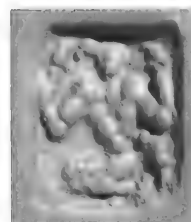
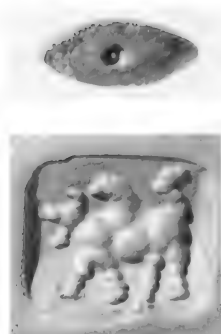
Southern Turkmenistan; 1st half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

Limonite; H. 18 mm., Diam. 8 mm.

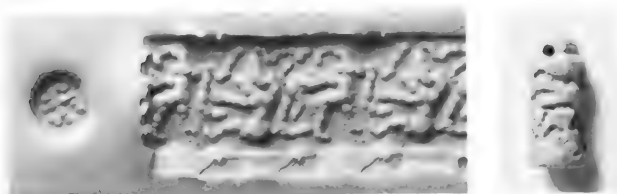
A caprid; a boar(?) at right angles. In the field, a plant and undulating snakes. On the base, a reversed swastika.

L.1983.125.4

42



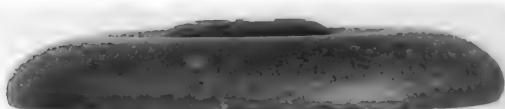
43



- 44. Circular stamp seal with flat rectangular handle**
 (handle engraved, perhaps in modern times, with two eyes and a nose)
 Western Central Asia or eastern Iran(?); 2nd millennium B.C.(?)

Azurite; H. 9 mm., Diam. 52 mm.

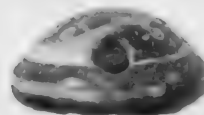
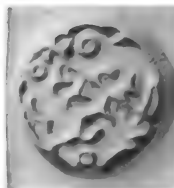
Standing bull in center, surrounded by two caprids, three birds, a snake, and unidentified forms.
 1987.96.20



44



45



46





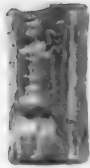
47



45. Long-handled compartmented stamp seal

Northern Afghanistan(?); 2nd millennium B.C.
Copper alloy; H. 37 mm., Diam. 20 mm.

Three creatures arranged in a compartmented circle.
1985.192.27



48



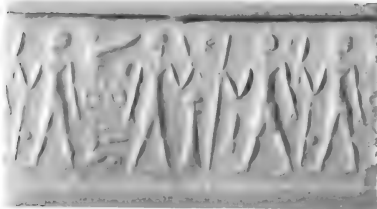
46. Carinated hemispheroid stamp seal (back decorated with incised lines and concentric circles)

Persian Gulf; early 2nd millennium B.C.
Steatite or chlorite; H. 12 mm., Diam. 25 mm.

Male figure grasps a caprid with reversed head by the neck. To the left, a male figure holds a staff. Below, a recumbent caprid beneath a gridded rectangle. In the field, a snake and a monkey(?).
1987.96.22



49



47. Cylinder seal

Syria; Old Syrian II, ca. 1920–1840 B.C.
Hematite; H. 17 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Winged and armed deity and a bird on an altar(?) approached by a bearded male in a long robe with a staff and a figure in a kilt holding a snake or lightning. Terminal: a bird and a scorpion.
1985.192.9

48. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 20 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Above, a nude goddess faces a reversed lion over a jug and a sphinx; goddess with a flowing vase faces a kneeling nude hero with a vessel. Below, a male figure in a tall banded headdress, followed by two male figures, spears a bull; a griffin demon kneels behind it.
1985.192.8

49. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

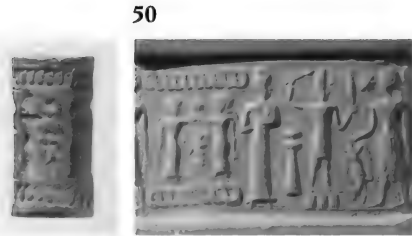
Two bald males, nude except for a belt and holding a spear and branch, approach a similar figure with a branch before an altar. Terminal: a bird, a guilloche band, and a hare. In the field, a star, a hare, a protome, and a ball staff.
1984.383.18

50. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 20 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Smiting weather god with a plant, on a storm cloud or a mountain, is approached by a worshiper offering a goat. Figure in a flounced robe with an altar behind. In the sky, a star. Terminal: a star, a monkey-hybrid between embracing figures, and a guilloche frame.

1986.311.49

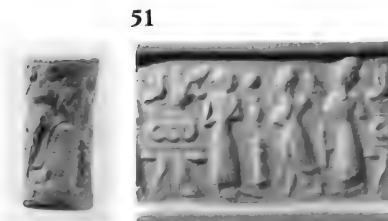


51. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 20 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Male (royal) figure with curved beard and fringed mantle over a kilt, flanked by two figures in long fringed robes. On either side of the central figure, a bird above a ball staff and a rosette over a lentoid vessel above an altar(?). Terminal: confronting birds, a guilloche band, and confronting hares.

1985.192.10

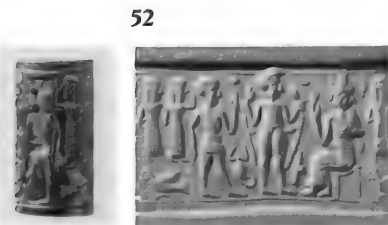


52. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 19 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Seated deity is approached by a nude goddess drawing up her mantle, a kilted male worshiper, and two smaller females. In the field, a scorpion, a bird, a ball staff, and celestial symbols.

1987.96.7

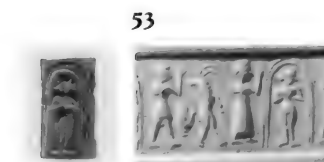


53. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian I, ca. 1820–1730 B.C.
Hematite; H. 13 mm., Diam. 8 mm.

Nude goddess wearing a cap under a double-arc canopy is approached by a worshiper and a man behind a goat, upright with head reversed. In the field, a hand.

1986.311.48



54. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian II, ca. 1720–1650 B.C.
Hematite; H. 25 mm., Diam. 9 mm.

Two (weather) deities in fringed kilts and horned plumed helmets hold branching lightning standards while flanking heraldic griffins, heads overlapping at tree; volutes and flowers of tree framed by a winged sun disk and ibexes. Guilloche borders.

L.1986.47.22



54



55. Cylinder seal

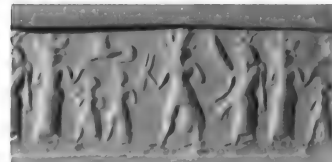
Syria; Classic Syrian II, ca. 1720–1650 B.C.
Hematite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 19 mm.

Goddess holding spears wearing a square horned miter and a short fringed kilt and an Egyptianizing winged deity with a Hathor crown confront an Egyptianizing deity wearing a sheath and a crescent-and-sun-disk headdress. Between them, a lion above two male figures.

1984.383.19



55



56. Cylinder seal

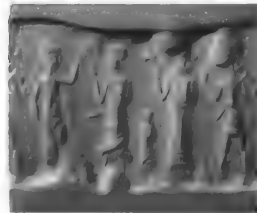
Syria; Classic Syrian II, ca. 1720–1650 B.C.
Hematite; H. 22 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Two goddesses, one with a cylindrical hat and a bordered mantle, the other partially nude, hold an ankh over a king(?), followed by his son(?). To the right, a weather god(?) wearing a kilt holds a cup and shoulders an ax.

1986.311.46



56



57. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian II, ca. 1720–1650 B.C.
Hematite; H. 26 mm., Diam. 13 mm.

Smiting armed weather god on mountains is approached by a small male, a king offering a bird, and a Babylonian suppliant goddess. A female approaches a seated male holding a vessel below birds. In the field, astral symbols, a plant, and a ball staff.

L.1986.47.3



57





58

58. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian II, ca. 1720–1650 B.C.
Hematite; H. 29 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Three robed males, two in royal headgear, one with harpe, approach a Babylonian suppliant goddess. In the field, birds, a star, a monkey-hybrid, and a ball staff. Below, a banquet scene with a human procession. Terminal: marching men in kilts, a guilloche band, and griffin demons in Egyptian stiff kilts.

1985.192.11



59. Cylinder seal

Syria; Classic Syrian II “Aleppo Group,” ca. 1720–1650 B.C.

Hematite; H. 26 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Syrian goddess with a square horned miter and a nude goddess approach a smiting weather god wielding a harpe and a mace; a galloping ibex above a seated lion. In the field, a crescent, a sun disk, and ankh symbols.

L.1986.47.1

59



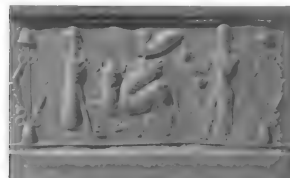
60. Cylinder seal

Syria; Syro-Mitannian, ca. 1500–1350 B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 18 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Human-headed winged bull below a reversed bird of prey is flanked by two men in long robes, one holding a caprid, the other pulling the bull's horn. Terminal: ornate spade standard.

1987.96.8

60



61. Cylinder seal

Syria; Syro-Mitannian, ca. 1500–1350 B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 18 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Enthroned figure raising a cup(?) faces a heraldic group of two winged bull demons kneeling before a central standard surmounted by a rayed sun disk. In the field, tangential circles and a bird.

1986.311.50

61



62. Cylinder seal

Syria; Syro-Mitannian, ca. 1500–1350 B.C.

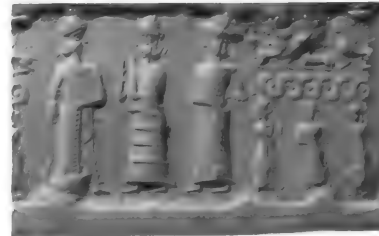
Quartz; H. 26 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Male deity wearing a long robe and holding his hands toward his waist and a suppliant goddess face a king(?) wearing a kilt under an open mantle and holding a scimitar. Terminal: two lions attacking a central caprid, a guilloche band, and suppliants flanking a central figure with hands toward the waist.

1986.311.40



62



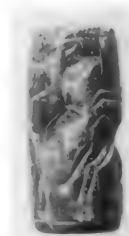
63. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian linear style, 9th–8th century B.C.

Serpentine; H. 27 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

Bull mounting a cow suckling a calf, before a male figure wearing a kilt. In the sky, a crescent and a star. In the field, a plant.

1983.314.9



63



64. Cylinder seal (with grooves, rather than string hole, on ends; base engraved)

Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian drilled style, 9th–8th century B.C.

Agate; H. 35 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Armed male deity (Adad?) between stars and Ishtar in nimbus approached by a worshiper. Terminal: a crescent standard on a pedestal. In the field, seven globes (Pleiades?), a hand, and a spade. On the base, a fish and a rhomb.

1985.192.15

64



65. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian drilled style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Carnelian; H. 29 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Ishtar with weapons and astral ring greets a worshiper. An armed god (Adad?) stands on a platform within the precinct. In the field, a star, a rhomb, and seven globes (Pleiades?).

1985.192.7



65

66. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian drilled style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Chalcedony; H. 29 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Two male worshipers flank a central tree below a winged sun disk, with a scorpion and a bucranium near its ornamented trunk. Terminal: two worshipers flank a spade below a collapsed bull and a star rosette.

1984.383.22



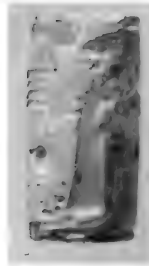
67. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian cut style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Milky quartz; H. 22 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Worshiper before a table and an altar; sacred tree below a winged sun disk, flanked by a caprid and a fish. In the field, a crescent, a rhomb, a cross, and a star.

1983.314.11



66

68. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian modeled style, 10th–8th century B.C.

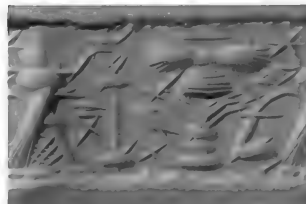
Chalcedony; H. 34 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Winged hero wearing a kilt and a square cap (weather god) has one foot on a galloping winged horse and brandishes a scimitar and a mace in a smiting posture against an attacking lion griffin. In the field, a winged bird-headed quadruped, a crescent, and a plant.

1985.192.14



67



68



69



69. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia or Iran; Neo-Babylonian or Neo-Elamite, 8th–7th century B.C.

Chalcedony; H. 34 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Male figure wearing a long robe grasps the horn of a winged human-headed bull striding toward him; a smiting hero wearing a kilt stands with his foot on the creature's back. In the field, an inscription.

1987.96.10

70. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Assyrian modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Chalcedony; H. 31 mm., Diam. 13 mm.

Ishtar, with crossed quivers, starred crown, and astral ring, stands on a platform before a kneeling worshiper within a precinct flanked by two winged genii with buckets and date spathes; spear standards border the precinct.

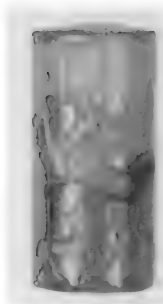
L.1986.47.2



70



71



71. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 36 mm., Diam. 16 mm.

Bearded hero wearing a kilt dominates two rampant sphinxes with feathered crowns by holding their forelegs (right sphinx unfinished). Small addorsed caprids flank the central figure.

1983.314.12

72. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 33 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Scorpionman and bullman brandishing weapons pull the hair of a kneeling nude male with six curls; an attendant figure in a fish robe with a bucket and a date spathe. In the field, a stylus, a bird, a fish, and a caprid.

1983.314.13



72



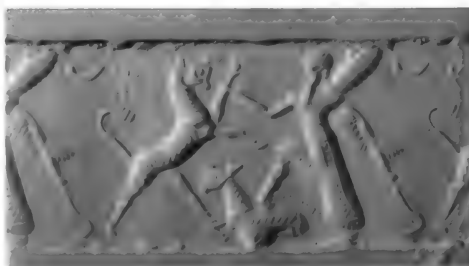
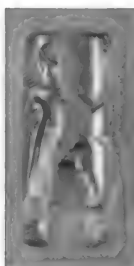
73. Cylinder seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 28 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

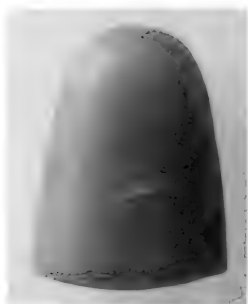
Winged hero in a long patterned garment with one foot on a recumbent calf holds a scimitar in his left hand and grasps the foreleg of a rampant bull. In the sky, a crescent and a star.

1984.383.21

73



74



74. Conical stamp seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian modeled style, 6th century B.C.

Carnelian; H. 34 mm., L. 17 mm., W. 26 mm.

Male worshiper before a seated dog and a scimitar on an altar. In the sky, a crescent.

1984.383.44

75. Conical stamp seal

Mesopotamia; Neo-Babylonian drilled style, 6th century B.C.

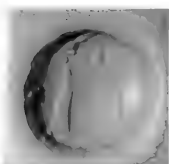
Chalcedony; H. 25 mm., Diam. 16 mm.

On the base, a worshiper before a spade and a stylus on an altar. On the sides, a seated dog and a smiting male figure.

1984.383.40



75



76. Cylinder seal

Iran; Neo-Elamite modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Calcite; H. 23 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Winged demon with human head wearing a knobbed horned cap and with clawed forelegs and a scorpion tail strides on bovine hindquarters. A four-line framed inscription.

1986.311.55

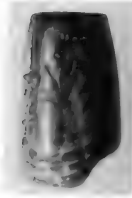


76

77



78

**77. Cylinder seal**

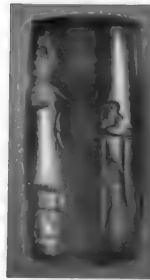
Iran; Neo-Elamite, 8th–7th century B.C.
Faience; H. 20 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Humped bull stands before a modified spade and a stylus on an altar. In the sky, a star.
1984.383.20

78. Cylinder seal

Iran; Achaemenid, 6th–5th century B.C.
Agate; H. 24 mm., Diam. 13 mm.

Two men in royal dress worship a deity emerging from a sun disk supported by two sphinxes.
1984.383.24



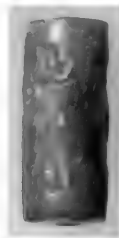
79

**79. Cylinder seal**

Iran; Achaemenid, 6th–5th century B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 32 mm., Diam. 16 mm.

Archer in Persian dress shoots a rampant lion attacking a boar. In the sky, a winged sun disk with emerging deity.
1984.383.25

80





81



80. Cylinder seal

Iran; Achaemenid, 6th–5th century B.C.
Chalcedony; H. 25 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Royal figure in Persian dress as master of animals with his arms extended over the heads of two rampant lions. Terminal perpendicular to main scene: lion attacking caprid.

1985.192.5



82



81. Cylinder seal

Iran; Achaemenid, 6th–5th century B.C.
Calcite; H. 23 mm., Diam. 10 mm.

Lion with head reversed rears behind a stag with head reversed galloping toward a tree.

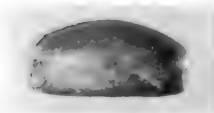
1986.311.54

82. Cylinder seal

Syria; peripheral Neo-Assyrian linear style, 9th–8th century B.C. (possibly inscribed later)
Carnelian; H. 29 mm., Diam. 11 mm.

Archer in a sphinx-drawn chariot attacks a rampant sphinx. In the field, a star, a crescent, plants, and an inscription of three signs. Guilloche borders.

1986.311.58



83

83. Scaraboid stamp seal

Syria; Phoenician, 8th–7th century B.C.
Calcite; H. 10 mm., W. 17 mm.

Recumbent female sphinx with an Egyptianizing wig holds a plant. In the sky, an abbreviated sun disk. Hatched exergue.

1984.383.33

84. Scaraboid stamp seal

Syria; peripheral Neo-Assyrian modeled style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Chalcedony; H. 13 mm., Diam. 18 mm.

Two bearded males in long open garments, with front legs thrust forward and arms raised toward a winged sun disk. Below disk, a bird; rope border.

1985.192.33

85. Fist-shaped stamp seal

Northern Syria; peripheral Achaemenid (paralleled at Deve Hüyük), 6th–5th century B.C.

Ceramic; H. 18 mm., Diam. 17 mm.

Attacking lion griffin (winged horned lion?) with outspread wings leaps over a recumbent ibex.

1987.96.36

86. Scaraboid stamp seal with circular face

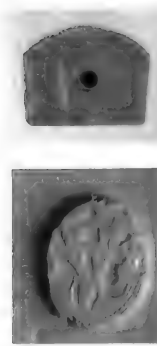
Syria; peripheral Achaemenid modeled style, 6th–5th century B.C.

Chalcedony; H. 15 mm., Diam. 22 mm.

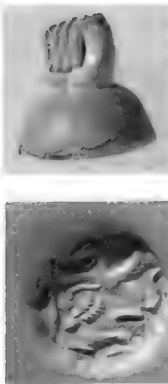
Horned lion griffin crouches on a platform in front of a scimitar. In the sky, a crescent.

1984.383.49

84

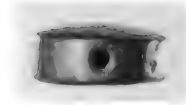


85

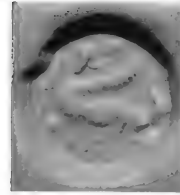


86





87



87. Discoid stamp seal

Urartu; linear style, 8th–7th century B.C.

Black marble; H. 8 mm., Diam. 19 mm.

Winged sphinx with scorpion tail stands before plant.
In the field, drillings.

1984.383.41

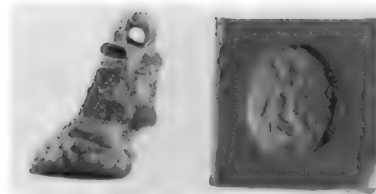
88. Bull's-hoof stamp seal with loop handle

Urartu; 8th–7th century B.C.

Copper/bronze; H. 22 mm., Diam. 15 mm.

Kneeling winged genius.

1980.78.3



88

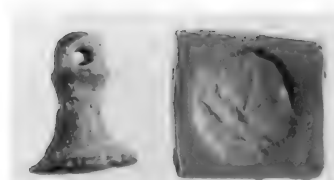
89. Bell-shaped stamp seal with loop handle

Urartu; 8th–7th century B.C.

Copper/bronze; H. 17 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Winged quadruped(?).

1980.78.9



89

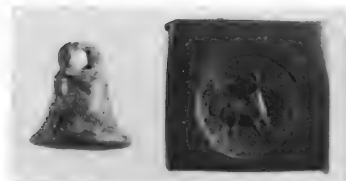
90. Bell-shaped stamp seal with loop handle

Urartu; 8th–7th century B.C.

Copper/bronze; H. 15 mm., Diam. 14 mm.

Standing quadruped.

1980.78.5



90



91



92

91. Loop-handled stamp cylinder seal

Urartu; gouged style, 8th–7th century B.C.
Calcite; H. 37 mm., Diam. 17 mm.

On the cylinder, a mounted hunter with a spear and a standing archer attack a rampant lion over a dead caprid; the lion attacks a third man kneeling behind a tall shield and armed with arrows and a spear. In the field, a crescent and a rosette. On the base, a winged lion with bovine horn and hooves and a scorpion tail leaps above a plant. In the sky, a crescent.

1981.325

92. Loop-handled stamp cylinder seal

Urartu; linear style, 8th–7th century B.C.
Steatite or chlorite; H. 28 mm., Diam. 12 mm.

On the cylinder, kneeling winged genii each holding a date-palm spathe flank a tree surrounded by small dots (seeds?). In the field, a star, a rosette, and a crescent. On the base, a roaring lion with forepaws extended.

1987.96.12

TRANSLITERATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF SEAL INSCRIPTIONS

Seal 21

MMA 1986.311.37

1. 𒌦ugal - 𒍪
2. (completely defaced)
3. [x x]x zu/ZU

REMARKS

The seal inscription is erased, with only traces remaining. No translation is offered.

Seal 23

MMA 1986.47.34

Col. I

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. ^d I-bi- ^d EN.ZU | Ibbi-Sîn, |
| 2. lugal kala-ga | the strong king, |
| 3. lugal Uri ^{ki} -ma | king of Ur, |
| 4. lugal an-ub-da | king of the four |
| limmu-ba | quarters (of the world), |

Col. II

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 5. DINGIR-ba-ni | Illum-bani, |
| 6. nu-bànda | the overseer, |
| 7. dumi Ì-lî-GI | son of Ilî-ukîñ, |
| 8. ìr-zu | (is) your servant |

Seal 25

MMA 1987.96.4

1. ^d. . .
2. DUMU . . .
3. ìR . . .

REMARKS

The seal cutter has so completely muddled the signs that no sense can be made of the inscription.

Seal 26

MMA 1986.311.43

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Ku-uk-in-zu-na-ak | Kukinzunak, |
| 2. DUMU Ku-uk- ^d Li-ga-we | son of Kuk-Ligawe, |
| 3. ìR šà ^d Hu-um-ba-an | slave of the god Humban |

NOTES

1: The transcription of the personal name *Ku-uk-in-zu-na-ak* is uncertain. The writing may either be an error for *Kuk-In-su-uš-na-ak* or for *Ku-uk-in-zu* (see V. Scheil, "Mélanges épigraphiques," *Mission archéologique de Susiane* 28 [1939], no. 547, and R. Zadok, *Elamite Onomasticon* [Naples, 1984], no. 72), or it may represent a conflation of the two names (references courtesy of M. Stolper).

2: For *Kuk-^dLigawe*, see V. Scheil, "Actes juridiques susiens," *Mission archéologique de Susiane* 23 (1930–33), no. 234:35, without ^d, and Zadok, *Elamite Onomasticon*, p. 26.

Seal 29

MMA 1987.96.5

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. PI-ti-tum | PI-titum, |
| 2. DUMU Iš-me- ^d EN.ZU | son of Išme-Sîn, |
| 3. ìR ^d NÈ.ER11.GAL | servant of Nergal |

NOTE

1: The reading of the personal name *PI-ti-tum* is unknown, although the name is well attested. See *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* 6 (1898), no. 31, 91–5–9, 2485:17 (reference courtesy of W. G. Lambert).

Seal 36

MMA 1984.383.14

1. ^dIškur ur.sag.gal Adad, the mighty hero
2. en a.a sag.ge.ga lord, father of the
black-headed people
3. ka/sag.ní ...
ezen × x(?)
ka/sag.ní

NOTE

3: The reading and meaning of this line are uncertain.

Seal 69

MMA L.1986.47.37

1. šá 'SAL-*ba/ma-al*
2. gur šá a a šá
3. šu
4. é/LÍL

REMARKS

No sense can be made of the inscription. According to W. G. Lambert, the text is either garbled or is written in an unidentified language. The signs indicate a Babylonian rather than an Assyrian script.

Seal 76

MMA 1986.311.55

1. 'Ad- 1–4. Adda-abeh
2. *da-a*
3. *a-be-*
4. *b*

REMARKS

It is uncertain (according to M. Stolper) whether the Neo-Elamite personal name is to be read as Adda-abeh, Addajabeh, or Adda-ābeh.

Seal 82

MMA 1986.311.58

1. SRY(Q?)

REMARKS

The personal name SRY(Q?) is inscribed in a Proto-Arabian script. The name is well attested in South Arabian onomastics. See G. Ryckmans, *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques*, vol. I (Louvain, 1934–35), p. 154 (reading of the name and references courtesy of S. Kaufman).

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes. The paper then moves on to discuss the challenges of conducting research in culturally diverse settings. It identifies several key challenges, including language barriers, differing research methodologies, and the potential for bias. The author argues that these challenges can be overcome through a combination of careful planning, open communication, and a willingness to learn from the community. The final part of the paper provides a series of recommendations for researchers. These include the importance of building trust with the community, using appropriate research methods, and being transparent about the research process. The author concludes by emphasizing the need for ongoing collaboration and reflection throughout the research process.